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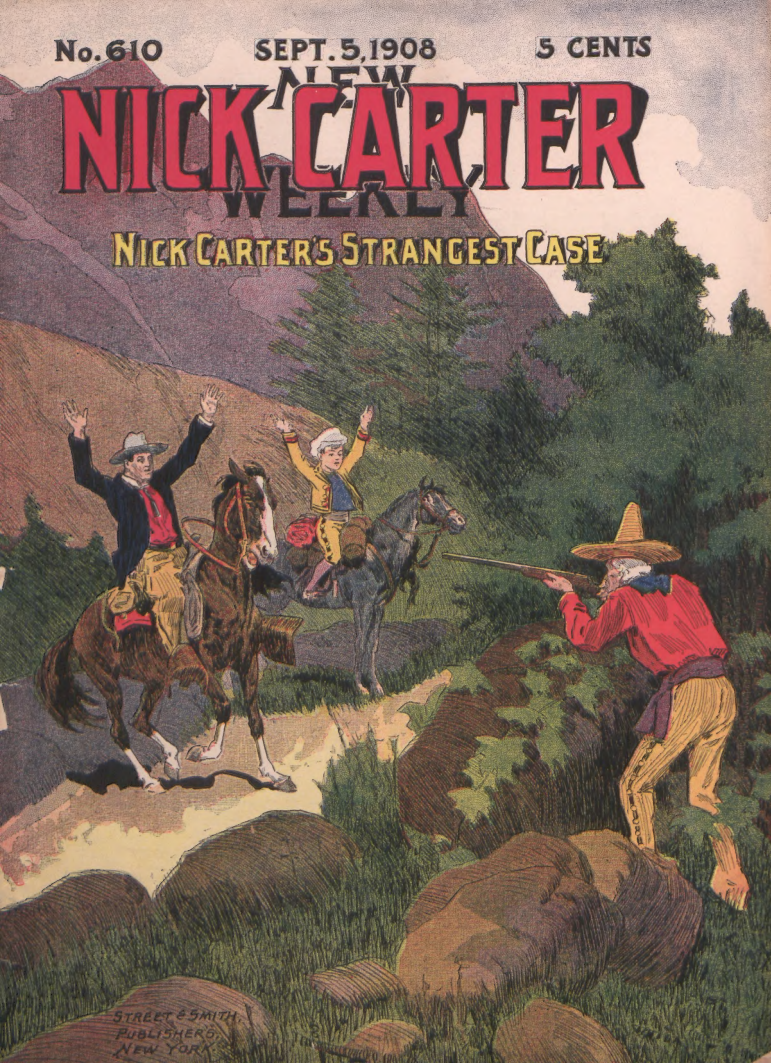
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST CASE



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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Nick Carter's Strangest Case

OR,

THE HACIENDA PLOT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A WAIF OF THE NIGHT.

Nick Carter stopped suddenly in his rapid walk up the street and looked down upon the mite of humanity which had darted out from the shelter of a doorway and was now staring up at the detective out of great, round, wonderfully black eyes which glistened strangely, as if they were filled to the brim with tears which the boy somehow kept from rolling down his cheeks by mere force of will and stubborn pride.

In height he did not reach much above Nick Carter's waist, and the detective judged him to be approximately seven years old, although he appeared both older and younger than that.

The night was not one which an ordinary pedestrian would consider cold; but there was a decided chill in the air, for all that, and the wind which howled down Broadway carrying penetrating sheets of rain before it seemed almost strong enough to pick up the little mite of a man and bear him away with it. For the encounter happened at two o'clock in the morning, in that part of Broadway, New York, that is now known far and near as "The Great White Way."

The boy stared at the detective for a moment, and then his eyes dimmed. The tears seemed about to fall in spite of his sturdy effort to hold them back; and he turned back again to the sheltering doorway without a word, and with a certain air of utter dejection about him which was most pathetic.

Perhaps you who read this know something about Nick Carter's fondness for children. Possibly you have been with him through a sufficient number of his adventures, prepared from his "Book of Cases" and edited by his first assistant, whom you know as Chick, to appreciate at once how that little waif, astray in Broadway on that stormy night, appealed to the detective as nothing else could have done.

It happened that there was not another pedestrian in sight at the time. If there was a policeman about, he, too, like the boy, had sought the shelter of some convenient doorway, for nowhere could Nick discover one as he glanced up and down the thoroughfare.

He followed the boy to his imperfect shelter at once, and, holding his umbrella so that it sheltered the small figure from the driving rain, he bent down and peered into the big black eyes.

"Well, my little man," he said, in the kindly tone he

knew so well how to adopt and which always appealed to boys, "were you searching for somebody, or did you run out to meet me because you thought you knew me?" and he smiled reassuringly into the limpid eyes.

But the little fellow made no reply. He only stared, biting his lips to keep back sobs of disappointment which were very near the surface.

And then, as Nick looked closer at the beautiful small face, it struck him that the boy was not only alone and deserted there, but that, also, he was a stranger in a strange land; in a word, that he had not understood the words the detective addressed to him.

But the kind tone the detective had used, and the warm smile that accompanied it, touched a responsive chord somewhere in the child's heart. With that intuitive perception which belongs only to childhood he seemed to recognize that here was a man who would be kind.

He tried bravely to smile, and he managed to murmur in a tone so low that the detective could barely hear it: *"No intiende, señor,"* which is Spanish for "I do not understand, sir."

Instantly the detective responded to those words in the same language, saying in Spanish:

"You did not understand me? That is too bad, isn't it? You see, niño, I did not know that you speak Spanish instead of the language we talk here. And now I will repeat the question I asked before. Were you searching for somebody, or did you run out to meet me because you thought you knew me?"

"I was looking for my papa, señor," was the low-toned reply.

"And did you think I might be your papa?"

"Yes, señor."

"Is it so dark that you could not tell at that distance that I was not your papa? It is very light here, you know. Do I look like your papa?"

"I don't know, señor."

"You do not know? How is that?"

"It is a very, very long time since I saw my papa."

"Oh, that is it. It is so long a time that you have almost forgotten how he did look?"

"Yes, señor."

"And you thought you would recognize him if you got closer?"

"I thought that he would know Lino." (Pronounced Leeno.)

"Is that your name, little man?"

"Not all of it, señor."

"Well, tell me all of it, won't you?"

"All of it, señor?"

"Yes; every bit of it. It must be a very nice name, since it belongs to such a brave little man, and I should like to hear all of it."

"My name is Tranquilino Angel José Maria del Corona y Agramonte; but I prefer to be known by the name that was my mother's, señor, and so usually I tell my name as just Tranquilino Agramonte, although my papa's name is José Miguel Filipi Neri del Corona."

"Goodness! But there are a lot of them, aren't there? I wonder that you remember all of them. And out of the lot you prefer to be called just Lino, do you not?"

"Yes, señor."

"Because that is what your mama calls you?"

"Yes, señor."

"Well, Lino, you are very wet, I see, and rather cold, too, aren't you?"

"Yes, señor."

"Then I will make a suggestion; but before I do that I will ask just a few more questions. Were you told to wait here for somebody?"

"Yes, señor."

"And how long have you been waiting?"

"Oh, ever so long. Hours. Many of them. Since there were a great many people walking up and down the street, and the doors of the stores were all open. I am very tired and very hungry, señor, and——"

"Well, I won't ask you any more questions just now, but I will make that suggestion. Don't you think it would be well if you were to go with me to my home, which is quite near here, where you can get warm and dry, and have something to eat, and let me take care of you until you are rested? And after that we will try to find your papa and mama?"

"Yes, señor. It is very kind of you. I like you. I am glad you came to me through the rain and wind."

"Certainly you are. Come, then. Will you let me pick you up in my arms and carry you?"

"I am very heavy, señor."

"Of course. How could a young man like you help being very heavy. But, you see, you are also very tired, and I am very strong. I think it would be a very good plan indeed for me to carry you; don't you, Lino?"

"Yes, señor; if you think you can."

"Let me try. I am quite sure that I can do it," and the detective bent forward, smiling, and, having crooked his left arm around the little soaked figure, lifted him from the pavement; and then, having pulled

the umbrella close down over his head to keep the driving rain out of his face, started rapidly onward with his small burden.

And the boy cuddled up against him closely, uttering a profound sigh of peace and contentment as he did so, remaining silent until they had covered the distance to Nick Carter's house on Madison Avenue.

Presently Nick Carter ascended the steps before his house, opened the door with his latch-key, and stepped into the lighted hall with his charge.

Joseph met them just inside the door and was despatched at once to wake Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, whose motherly proclivities some of us are familiar with; and then he carried the boy into the library, where an open fire of Tennessee coal was burning brightly in the grate.

"My, but you are wet!" exclaimed the detective, as he put him down. "But we will soon have you dry and warm. Now, what do you think you would like to eat, if you had exactly what you wanted?"

"I think some chocolate, señor; and some cabrito; and some pan dulce; and some—but I forgot that I was not at home. Perhaps, señor, you do not have all those things here?"

"Well, possibly not exactly those things, but I am sure that Señora Peters can find some very fair substitutes. In place of the chocolate, we will have some warm milk with Mellin's food stirred in it. Instead of the cabrito* some poached eggs and toast, and as we haven't any pan dulce,** we will sprinkle some sugar over the toast that Mrs. Peters will prepare."

"I think that will be very fine, señor."

Mrs. Peters entered the room at that moment, and was quickly apprised of the condition of affairs.

She gathered the little figure in her arms, and Lino cuddled close to her with another sigh of relief; only, alas! she could not speak Spanish, and the lad, therefore, did not understand all the endearing terms she applied to him; but he seemed to comprehend their general meaning well enough.

"I think I must get him to bed first and feed him afterward," she told the detective.

"No," he replied. "Feed him first and put him to bed afterward. It is warm in this room, and his wet clothes will do no harm if they remain on him a little longer; and she departed to prepare all the good things she could think of for Tranquilino to eat.

The detective was obliged to talk to him and to make him talk all the time she was gone to keep the little fellow from falling asleep before the fire before he could get food into the small stomach.

But it came presently, and Lino sat on Nick Carter's knee while Mrs. Peters fed him; and then when Nick explained that he must go with the señora and be put to bed, and that they would have a long talk in the morning, he went away with her quite cheerfully.

And the good woman put the little chap in her own warm bed with her, where he dropped asleep as soon as his head was on the pillow.

*Young kid.

**Sweet bread.

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG CASTAWAY.

The following day was Sunday, and it was almost noon before the tired little body was sufficiently rested to awaken from its lethargy; but Mrs. Peters brought Lino to the cozy study, presently, where the detective was awaiting him.

"I gave him his breakfast in bed, sir," she told Mr. Carter; "and my, you should have seen him eat. I do believe that the boy has been half-starved."

"He certainly was in that condition last night, Mrs. Peters," replied the detective, smiling and drawing Lino upon one knee, while he put his arm around him. "It is too bad that you cannot understand what he says; he is such a quaint little chap, and he talks as if he were a man grown."

"Oh, we got along very well together, sir. He understands the language of love; that is not spoken with words."

"And you always have a good supply of that in your heart for homeless little fellows like this one; eh?"

"What woman could be a woman who did not, sir? I will leave him with you now, sir?"

"Yes."

So she departed, leaving the two together, and for a long time there was not a word spoken between them.

But at last Lino climbed down out of his protector's arms and ensconced himself in the depths of a huge, leather-covered chair over in the corner from where he fixed his brilliant, almost speaking, eyes upon the face of the detective, and solemnly studied his new friend for a long time, in silence; and Nick let him take his own time. He should have had many children

of his own, he knew so perfectly well how to get along with them.

"I think you are a very good and kind man, señor," the boy remarked demurely, at last.

"Thank you, Lino. I wish to be very kind and good to you, if possible. We must have quite a long, business talk together to-day, don't you think so?"

"Yes, señor."

"I will tell you something before we begin, so that you will understand what I have been doing about you while you were asleep, Lino."

"If you please, señor."

"Well, I have telephoned to many places in the city to find out if a boy about your size had been reported lost, but I haven't been able to get any information on the subject."

"No, señor; you would not be likely to do that, because, you see, I wasn't lost."

"Not lost? I thought you were."

"No; I was left where you found me, and told to wait there till my papa came to me."

"Oh, that was it? And from what place were you taken to that spot where I found you?"

"From the railway-station, señor."

"From the railway-station! Do you know what one?"

"No, señor; save that it was a very large place—much larger than any I ever saw before except once while we were on the way here; and there were a great many people walking about it, and many cars and engines, and a great deal of noise."

"When you left the station did you go upon a boat before you went to the place where I found you?"

"Yes, señor."

"Was it dark, then, when you went on the boat?"

"No; it was not dark yet."

"I wish you could remember the name of the boat that you was on, but I don't suppose you were told that, or noticed it, did you?"

"No, señor. But there was a strange mark on the big chimneys of the boat that I remember very well indeed. I cannot describe it to you, but if you will let me take a pencil I think I can make a picture of it."

"Good! Here is a pencil and some paper. Now, let me see what that mark was like."

Tranquilino made with the pencil a very fair outline of a keystone, and Nick Carter exclaimed, with pleasure:

"You came to the city by the Pennsylvania Railroad. That is plain. Did you go to a hotel, do you think?"

"No; we went to a house, where I was left in a room by myself for a long time. And then we went out again. It was dark then, only for the lights along the streets, and they were very bright."

"Where did you go then, Lino?"

"We went to that place where you found me, señor; but it was a long way, and I was very tired of walking in the wind and rain when we got there. Then we——"

"Wait just a moment. Was it your mama who came to the city with you and who took you to the house you have referred to?"

"Oh, no, sir. My mama would not have made me walk. She would not have left me alone in that room so long, and have given me only cold things to eat when I was so very hungry."

"Who was it, then, who came to the city with you and took you to that house and afterward made you walk so far in the wind and rain?"

"Don Ribera."

"Eh? And who is Don Ribera?"

"I don't know, señor."

"What? You do not know with whom you were traveling?"

"No, señor."

"How does that happen?"

"That is the name he told me to call him. He was a very tall, dark man; much taller than other men I have seen. He said he was my uncle, but I did not believe him, although that is the name of my uncle—Don Ribera Agramonte. I have heard my mama tell about him, and that was why I consented to go with him; because he said he was my uncle—my mama's brother."

"But you afterward decided that he was not you uncle?"

"Yes, señor. He was not as kind to me as I thought my uncle should have been. He was very harsh and cold, and he spoke crossly to me many times. My mama always told me that Don Ribera was very kind, and loved her, and would love me, too. I would not have gone with that man if I had not thought at the time that he was my uncle."

"And where were you when you came away with him? Where did you start from?"

"From the hacienda, señor."

"Where is the hacienda?"

"It must be in Mexico, señor, because I am a Mexican gentleman."

"Certainly it is in Mexico, in that case," replied Nick solemnly. "Do you know what part of Mexico?"

"No, señor. Just Mexico."

"What is the name of the city that is nearest to the hacienda, Lino? Do you remember that about it?"

"I have heard the names of many cities, but I do not know which is the nearest."

"What one have you heard mentioned most frequently?"

"Mexico, I think; and Chihuahua, and Guadalajara, and Puebla, and Salamanca, and Durango, and San Luis Potosi, and Morelia."

"Dear me! They are almost as far apart as San Francisco and New York, St. Paul and New Orleans. Have you seen nobody whom you knew since you left the hacienda with Don Ribera?"

"No, señor."

"How long ago was that, Lino? Can you remember?"

"Oh, it was very, very long ago indeed. Days and days. I have forgotten how many."

"A week?"

"More than that, I think, señor."

"Was your mama at home when you came away from there?"

"No, señor. Don Ribera told me that he was sent there to take me to both my mama and papa, and I wanted to see my mama so badly that I did not think of refusing, particularly when he said he was my uncle and that he had been sent to get me. I thought it strange that he did not find Anita or Pancho and tell them that we were going away; but he said there was not time."

"Who is Anita? And who is Pancho?"

"Anita is my nurse. Pancho is the administrador of the hacienda." (The manager).

"Were they both there when you came away, Lino?"

"Yes, señor."

"What time of day was it then?"

"Evening. Almost time for darkness."

"And where were you when you met Don Ribera?"

"I was riding my pinto pony."

"Tell me what the man said to you when you met him. Tell me all about it; all that you can remember; just what he said to you and what you said to him."

"It was down at the end of a short trail, señor, that leads to two springs that come out of the ground very near together, only one of them gives out hot water and the other one gives out cold water. They are not farther apart than twice the length of this room, señor, and are very wonderful. It is a very pretty road from the house to the two springs, as they are called——"

"That reminds me, Lino: What is the name of the hacienda?"

"Oh! That; it is called the Hacienda de las Aguas." (Hacienda of the Two Waters).

"Thank you. Go on, now."

"It is not more than one kilometer from the house to the two springs, for which the hacienda is named, and always when I rode my pony in the evening I galloped there and back; sometimes I did it twice."

"Well?"

"That evening, when I returned after making the ride once, Pancho was not about, and, although it was almost dark, I turned about and rode back again. Then, just as I got close to the two springs, the man who said he was Don Ribera came out from behind the house that is built over the hot spring, and saluted me. I returned his salute; and then he came swiftly forward, calling me by name and saying how fortunate it was that he had found me so soon. He said that he was my uncle, and that he had come there to take me to my mother and my father, who were waiting for me. I was overjoyed to know that, and asked him where they were waiting, but I did not understand what he said in reply to that; only I supposed then that it was not far. I was glad to see my uncle because I had heard my mama tell so much about him, although I did not even then like Don Ribera's looks or his manner."

"Go on, Lino, what else?"

"He asked me if I had seen Pancho or Anita in the last half-hour, and when I told him I had not, he assured me that they were searching for me to tell me that he had come there to get me, and that I was to go with him at once, to my mama. So I went with him without an idea that I was not doing right. He sprang upon a horse and led my pony; and after we had ridden a little way we came to where a diligencia was waiting, and he told me I was to get inside with him. I did so, and he gave me some candy to eat; and then I became very sleepy; and when I awakened I was on a railway-train which was going very fast, and the man was sitting beside me. But I was not feeling very well, and I did not ask him any questions at once because at the time I could not remember very well what had happened or why I was there. I must have gone to sleep again, I think, for when I again awoke I was in bed on the cars, and the train was going very fast through the night."

"But it was daylight when you awoke the first time?"

"Yes, señor."

"So that was the second night after he left home; and he had been drugged," thought the detective.

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST TRAIL.

"I wish you were a little older, Tranquilino," said the detective. "But probably if you had been that you would not be here now. But, never mind, we will find your mama for you before very long. Did you ask Don Ribera about where he was taking you?"

"Yes, señor; the very next morning."

"Tell me about that."

"There isn't anything to tell only what I have already said. He always told me the same thing, which was that he was taking me to my mama; only I began not to believe him."

"Naturally."

"I told him that I did not suppose it was so far, or I would not have gone with him without first seeing Pancho."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He told me, very crossly, to shut up."

"And then?"

"I did not speak to him again till the next day."

"You were offended."

"Yes, señor; and very unhappy. But he seemed to be sorry that he had spoken unkindly to me, for he said so. Then he told me that my mama was in a big city very far away to the north, and that he was taking me to her as fast as he could. I tried to believe him then. He said it would be many days before we would arrive, and that I was not to worry about Pancho and Anita, who had had charge of me, because they knew all about it."

"What more?"

"After that he was kinder to me, although sometimes he scowled terribly. We traveled many days together——"

"Just you two?"

"Yes, señor. Once we stopped in another city where the air was filled with black smoke and I heard a man say that it was St. Louis. I remember it because I wondered at the time if that was the way he pronounced San Luis—for that was what I supposed it was."

"Yes, Lino; but not the same one. San Luis, that you have heard about is in Mexico. Did you remain there very long?"

"All that day. I was alone at the hotel almost all day, but I could not talk the language to ask questions and to tell anybody how I had been taken away from my home. Don Ribera came back to the hotel before dark, and we had dinner in the room together. Then we came away from it and went on the railroad again. And then there were more days and nights until yesterday, when we arrived at the station from where we took the boat. I told you about that, señor."

"Yes, Lino."

"I think that is all, señor."

"When you were taken to the house in this city and left alone in a room where something to eat was given you, who did you see there?"

"Nobody at all, señor; only Don Ribera."

"Was there no one else in that house?"

"Oh, yes. I heard several voices, but I did not see anybody."

"Did you hear what they talked about?"

"I heard, but I did not understand. They talked in a language that was strange."

"They were near to you, then?"

"In the next room. I could hear all the words, but I could not understand any of them."

"How did you go to that house, Lino?"

"In a carriage."

"Did you hear Don Ribera tell the driver the address so he could take you there?"

"No, señor."

"So you have no idea where the house is situated?"

"No, señor."

"Did you enter the carriage as soon as you left the boat, or did you go somewhere in a street-car first?"

"We took the carriage."

"And now, try and remember if you cannot tell me in what direction the carriage went after you got inside of it. Shut your eyes and think hard, and then try to remember the buildings and other things you passed while you were in the carriage. I suppose you looked out through the window all the time, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, señor. It was so very strange and different from anything I had ever seen before, you know."

"Of course. The man did not try to prevent you from looking out?"

"No, señor. He seemed to have forgotten me entirely. He kept muttering words that I could not understand, and he looked out of the other window."

"Now, try to tell me what you saw, from the very first moment you entered the carriage."

"Well, señor, there were many street-cars standing about, and they kept going away when others came to take their place. They went around in a sort of circle, and went up the same street they had come down."

"Yes. That describes the appearance of things around Twenty-third Street ferry very well. If you can recall all the route as well as that part of it, you will do well."

"Then we drove along a wide street where there were many cars passed us, going both ways all the time; and they went along without anything pulling them at all."

"Yes, Lino. They are electric cars. Now, tell me on which side of Don Ribera you were seated."

"He was on my right, señor."

"Then it was the north side of Twenty-third Street you were looking at through the window. What next attracted your attention?"

"We went under a bridge——"

"That was the elevated railroad. What next?"

"The *elevated* railroad, señor?"

"Yes; I will tell you about it and take you to ride on it some other time. What next?"

"There was another elevated railroad, señor, and, oh, so many people and such strange vehicles and so many horses, and also funny wagons that had no horses to draw them, going in every direction."

"Those were automobiles, and the place was Twenty-third Street and Sixth Avenue. What did you next see that attracted your attention?"

"There was another place where there were many street-cars and people; and there was a plaza on my side of the carriage."

"Madison Square. Go on."

"And I saw a building with a tower so high that I could not see the top of it out of the window. I saw it across one corner of the plaza; but the carriage turned, then, and we went along another side of the plaza, passing in front of the building with the great tower."

"You turned up Madison Avenue, at Twenty-third Street. Lino, you are doing splendidly. If you can keep it up to the end as well as you have begun, we will come pretty near finding out where you went. But don't fail to tell me of everything you noticed; and if the carriage turned, you must try to tell me whether it turned to the right or the left. You know which is right and which is left, do you not?"

"Yes, señor."

"Well?"

Tranquilino sat with puzzled brow for a little time, trying to remember. At last he began again:

"I don't seem to remember much except many, very many houses along the street after that; and many wagons without horses and some with horses, passing us going both ways. We crossed another wide street where there were more cars that you call electric, and on the next street beyond that we turned to the left again and——"

"That would be Thirty-fifth Street. How far did you go along that street?"

"Only a short distance. We turned to the right, then."

"You turned up Fifth Avenue. Well, what next attracted you?"

"A very wonderful building. I leaned far out at the window to see it. It looked like pictures I have seen in books, only it was not high."

"That was the Library building, between Fortieth and Forty-second Streets, on Fifth Avenue. I suppose you crossed another car-track soon after that, didn't you?"

"Yes; but we had to stop and wait along with many other carriages, for a long time, and Don Ribera muttered bad words while we were waiting."

"What next attracted your attention, Lino?"

"Oh, a wonderful place. It was not a plaza; it was too big for that. I have heard about the Alameda in the city of Mexico, and it must have been like that; and we drove among the trees for a long time; and the road was not straight so I could not tell you of the times we turned to the right and left. I became quite turned around."

"Naturally. Tell me the first thing you noticed after you drove out of the park, or as you were leaving it."

"A very large house that was entirely different from any I had seen before."

"Why was it different?"

"Because it stood alone, with no houses on any side of it; and there was a wonderful iron fence all the way around it. A very high fence that I could not begin to climb over."

"I suppose not. And did the house stand on high ground, Lino, so that it seemed to be much higher than the street?"

"Yes, señor."

"What was the general shape of the house?"

"I don't know, señor; but I should think it was

square; and there was a balcony along one side of it, and there was no door in front. I thought it strange."

"Andrew Carnegie's house," thought the detective. "Did you drive straight past it after you left the park, or did the carriage turn?"

"We went straight past it, señor."

"Through Ninety-second Street, then. Now, try to remember how many car-tracks you crossed before you made another turn."

"One, señor; and then we turned to the left along the next street where there were cars."

"Lexington Avenue, going north from Ninety-second Street. What next, Lino?"

"There was not much to see on that street, save only the cars that kept passing us. We crossed another car-track after a while; and finally we came to a wide street—there had been other wide streets before we got to it—where I saw some figures on a post at the corner. I think I can make them for you with the pencil."

He tried it, and made a very plain 125.

"Good! That was One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. What happened then?"

"We turned to the right and went under another bridge—I should say elevated railroad, and then under another one still that was not built the same; and there——"

"That would be Second Avenue."

"There we turned to the right again, and stopped at one side of the street."

"Before you had crossed another one?"

"I don't remember about that."

"Did you go very far before you stopped?"

"Not very. I don't remember. I was very tired, and the rain was falling. It was getting quite dark. I don't remember whether we crossed any more streets after that, before we stopped; but I do remember something very strange about the house we entered, after the carriage came to a stop and we were out of it."

"What was that, Lino?"

"It had three very large, golden balls over the door," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY ABOUT A LOST BOY.

A pawnbroker's sign.

That was what Tranquilino had described; there could be no doubt of it.

He had also succeeded in imparting a fairly correct idea of the location of the house to which he had been taken.

There is nothing more to be relied upon than the eyes of an observant boy, when he is questioned in an intelligent manner. There are few things along a route he travels that he will not see, particularly if the locality happens to be a novel one.

No doubt the man who had him in charge on that trip through the city had never given a thought to the idea that the boy would be able to describe what route he had been taken. He had relied upon the fact that the boy was a total stranger, and that he did not speak the language of New York; but we have already observed how easily and quickly Nick Carter got around those difficulties.

It seemed to Nick, judging of the circumstances by the knowledge now in his possession, that the boy had been brought all the way from Mexico to New York purposely to be abandoned in the streets of the great city, and ultimately to become what so many thousands of other boys become, a foundling.

And yet, the boy knew his name—all of it, and there was considerable, as we have seen. But, then, such an accumulation of names is the rule rather than the exception in all Spanish countries; and always it is the custom to tack the mother's maiden name to the end of the other one, prefixing it with the letter Y, so that this boy's name was Corona *and* Agramonte, for the letter "y" in Spanish is "and." His mother's name had been Agramonte before she married.

But he did know his name well enough to repeat all of it, and it did not seem to Nick that a man who meant to abandon him to any fate that might befall would drop him in the city of New York where every effort is always made to trace foundlings.

It had been rather a remarkable story thus far, and Nick felt that he had not heard all of it by considerable; he also realized that the only way in which he could get it all was to continue his present process of asking questions.

But now the boy surprised him by making another remark.

"Perhaps, señor," he said whimsically. "I did not tell you the exact truth about myself last night. It was not my intention to deceive you, but I forgot at the time one thing."

"What was that, Lino?"

"I forgot that Don Ribera left me in a doorway and told me to wait there until my papa came after me, I did not wait. I ran away."

"What is that? Now, Lino, you must tell me exactly what you did do."

"I had forgotten at the time, señor, that I ran when Don Ribera left me. I was so cold and tired and wet and hungry when you found me that I forgot that I might not be in the same doorway where I was left, although I thought it was the same."

"Tell me exactly what you mean, Lino."

"This, señor: I was afraid, after we had been in that house I have been telling you about, where the three golden balls hung over the door; and then the long walk in the rain——"

"Wait a moment, Lino. Isn't there another mistake right there. It would not have been possible for a little boy like you to walk from One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Second Avenue to Twenty-eighth Street and Broadway, in all that rain. You must have ridden part of the way, at least."

"I think I fell asleep, señor, in that room where I heard the men talking in the next one to it. I am sure now that I did. And I think I rode in the carriage again in my sleep. It seems so to me now. But really and truly, the first thing that I remember after it is being in the street in the rain, with Don Ribera clinging to my hand and shaking me; and after that we walked a long way. I am sure of that."

"I understand you now. You fell asleep in that room where they left you alone. When they found you in that condition, they merely carried you back to the carriage again and put you inside, and you did not awaken until the man was lifting you out again, after the carriage had returned down-town. You were not fully awake until he stood you on your feet in the rain, and he shook you; so you had no recollection of the return ride in the carriage."

"I seem to remember something about it now, señor."

"Well, now tell me what happened after you got out in the rain."

"We walked a long way, and I was wet and cold. Also I was hungry, for I ate very little of the food that had been given me at the house."

"Yes. Well?"

"We went through a street where it was dark and stopped upon a street where there were very, very many lights. Then Don Ribera led me to a door and told me to stand against it and wait there till my papa came.

"I told him that I did not want to wait there all alone in the wet, but he ordered me, in very cross words, to do so, and I was afraid.

"He said: 'It won't be long, and if you don't wait here you will be lost and starve to death.' Then he went away suddenly. But the very minute he was out of sight I also started away in the other direction, and I ran and ran just as fast as I could go, until I was too tired to go any farther.

"Then I found another doorway, and waited a long time; and then suddenly I remembered what Don Ribera had told me, and I was frightened again for fear my papa would not find me; and so I started back to find the doorway where he had left me.

"I remembered the direction from which I had come, and I went that way, looking all the time for the doorway where he had left me; and at last I thought I found it; and that is where I waited until you discovered me."

"You poor little lost child!"

"It was such a long time, señor, and the rain was so cold that more than once I had a hard time not to cry."

"Did no one speak to you?"

"Oh, yes, señor, several gentlemen spoke to me. One of them was a soldier, I think, for he had a uniform with brass buttons all down the front of it."

"That was a policeman. What did you tell him and the others who spoke to you?"

"I told them all that I was waiting for papa, although I don't think they understood any more than that it was my papa I was waiting for any more than I understood what they asked me."

"Probably not. And all the time you were doubtless blocks away from the place where the man left you and told you to wait. It is a very strange mix-up, my boy. I don't quite understand it."

To himself Nick was thinking:

"I can't see why the fellow left him there alone at all unless it was his intention to desert the boy, and yet the fact that the lad did not remain where he was told might suggest that the man did mean to return there later."

Aloud he said:

"Did you know where your mama was staying, at the time Don Ribera took you away from your home?"

"No, señor."

"How long a time had she been away from you?"

"Oh, very long. Weeks and weeks."

"Don't you know where she went?"

"She went to find my papa, so Pancho and Annette told me."

"And where was your papa?"

"At a place they call San Juan del Cloa."

"At *what?*" exclaimed Nick, for the boy had mentioned one of the most terrible prisons in all Mexico; that one which is located in the harbor of Vera Cruz, and which in times now past was used almost exclusively for political prisoners. It is whispered that there are some few of the same sort there now, on occasion, although it is not generally supposed that citizens are imprisoned at present for political reason in Mexico.

"At San Juan del Ulloa," repeated the boy quietly. "I don't know where it is, señor."

"Are you *sure* that your papa was *there?*" asked Nick.

"I don't think he was there when my mama went to see him, but I don't know. I heard Pancho talking to Annette when she was packing for mama to go away, and he said he was glad that Don José—that is my papa, you know—was not at San Juan del Ulloa any longer. I meant to ask mama about it before she went away, but I forgot to do so."

"Did your mama expect to bring your papa back to the hacienda when she returned?"

"No. When she kissed me good-by she was crying; and she said to me that she would come back just as soon as she could, and that then she would take me to see my papa."

"Upon my word, Lino, you seem to be involved in such a maze of perplexities that it staggers a fellow. Did you ever have any brother or sister?"

"No, señor."

"Would you remember the name of the State in Mexico, where the hacienda is located, if I should mention it to you?"

"I don't know about any States, señor; only Mexico."

"Did anybody ever mention in your presence *why* your papa went to the place they called San Juan del Ulloa?"

"Oh, yes, I heard about that one time when Pancho and Annette were talking about it, when they thought I was asleep."

"Good; that is more like it. Try to remember what it was they said about it."

"Why, they said that papa went there to that place because he had shot somebody dead, and that he never ought to have gone there at all because it was all a mistake, and he did not shoot the man, really. He only pretended, or something like that, or else really he did do it; but I couldn't understand which it was or what it was about."

"What was the name of the man they said he had shot?"

"I don't remember that, either. I don't think I heard it."

"Probably not. Now, let me think a moment. It must be over a week, or about a week, since you were spirited away from the hacienda; and you say your mama had been gone several weeks already at that time. Then this man who said he was your mother's brother came and carried you off. One thing is certain, my boy, and that is that you haven't any friends here in this city, unless you have been terribly mistaken about it all, *and your father and mother are really here, and Don Ribera was acting on the square all the time.* But if he was doing that why should he have taken you from the hacienda in the manner he did? And why should he have thought it necessary to drug you? And why should he have been harsh to you instead of trying to make you understand? And again, why should his first call in the city have been made at the house of a pawnbroker?"

There seemed to be a great many "whys" in the case, and Nick could not reply to one of them in a satisfactory manner.

"Tranquilino," he said at last, "I don't know where your mama is, of course, but I will find her for you, as soon as I can, if you will be a very good boy and try to be happy and contented here with me and with Mrs. Peters, while I look for her. Will you do that?"

"Yes, señor."

"And while we are waiting you must just try to think that you are *my* boy, will you?"

"Yes, señor. Only I think you ought really to tell me your name; don't you,"

"Bless me, have I forgotten to do that?"

"Yes, señor."

"Well, well, well. I must tell you at once, eh?"

"Please, señor."

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND ABDUCTION.

"I am Mr. Carter, Lino," said the detective smilingly. "I am perhaps better known merely as Nick Carter."

The boy did not make any immediate reply; but he sat there staring into the face of his new-found protector in a way which convinced the detective that the name meant something to him; that he had [illegible] heard it before and was trying to recall where and

where he had done so. So Nick kept silent and waited for memory to return to the young brain.

Presently Tranquilino asked:

"Were you ever at the hacienda of the two waters, señor?"

"No," replied the detective. "I do not even know where it is located. I wish I did, for at the present moment the knowledge would simplify matters very much."

"Did you never know my mama or my papa?"

"No."

"Nor Don Ribera?"

"No."

"Then perhaps, señor, you can help me to remember where it was that I heard your name before."

"Does the name mean something to you, Lino? Does it suggest something to you?"

"Yes. Oh, now I remember. It was a long time ago, before my papa went away to San Juan del Ulloa. There were some people at the hacienda and they were talking in a language I did not understand—with my papa. I remember that I listened, and the only words they used that I could remember afterward were those two which you say are your names, although I did not know what they meant, or even that they were names. But I heard it many times. Yes."

"Lino, that is a surprisingly old head you've got on your young shoulders. Now, do you remember whether it was your papa who used my name, or was it one of the persons who were with him?"

"Oh, it was not my papa."

"And can you not give me some idea how long ago it was?"

"No; only I remember that the pulque plants have been tapped twice since then."

"Splendid, Lino! You told me two important things in that reply. You told me that two years have passed since then, and moreover that your hacienda is far enough south in Mexico so that the maguey plant, the pulque plant is its principle source of revenue. Now, there is just one thing more that I wish you would try to remember for me, and after you have done that, or tried to do it, I am going to send you out for a ride through the city in one of those vehicles that go without horses—do you remember what they are?"

"Auto—mo—bael—ces, señor."

"Good."

"What was it you wished me to try to remember, señor?"

"This: I suppose that many people used to go to see your papa and mama—to visit them and to stay at the hacienda. Now, try to remember the names of some of those people."

"Oh, yes, I can do that."

"Very well. Tell me."

"I remember Don Guzman Himenes and Señora Himenes, Don Rafael del Puente, Don Santiago Holloman, and the Señora——"

Nick interrupted the boy by raising one hand quickly.

"Was Don Santiago Holloman a very large man with white hair growing on his face, and did he live at Coyocan?" he asked.

"Yes, señor."

"Ah! That is fine. Now I think we will arrive at an explanation of part of this mystery without much more trouble. And was it not Don Santiago whom you heard using my name?"

"I think it was, señor."

"All right, Lino. Now, I am not going to bother your young head with any more questions, at least for the present. You would like to go for a ride, would you not?"

"Very much, señor."

The detective rang for Joseph, and sent for Patsy, who came presently.

"Patsy," said the detective, "I want you to take this young gentleman of seven for a ride. He speaks only Spanish," and this was said in Spanish, by the way, "but he has a very good memory. I want you to go from here directly to the West Twenty-third Street ferry, and begin your ride there. Have Danny drive you through Twenty-third Street to Madison Avenue, then to Thirty-fifth Street, then to Fifth Avenue, then to and through the park to East Ninety-second Street, then through Ninety-second to Lexington Avenue, up Lexington to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, and then east to Second Avenue; then turn south, *and when you do that ask Tranquilino to point out to you, if he can, the house he entered yesterday with the man who brought him to New York.*"

"Very good, chief."

"But don't stop at the house. Drive past it. If the boy is sure about it, take especial note of the place. You and I will go there together, later on."

As soon as the detective was alone, he wrote two telegrams, as follows:

"To James Holloman, *Coyocan, Mexico.*

"Telegraph me, at my expense, location of Hacienda de las Aguas. Also all information you can supply concerning José del Corona and his family. Follow

message with letter containing further information you do not wish to incorporate in telegram. Corona's boy, Tranquilino, is with me. NICK CARTER."

The second message was addressed to the minister of the interior of Mexico, and said:

"Please telegraph at my expense description and location of Hacienda de las Aguas and its owner.
"NICK CARTER."

Then, after some thought, he added a third message to the others. This one was addressed to his good friend, whom we have met before, the chief of police of the City of Mexico; and it read:

"Please supply me, as completely as you can, with information concerning José Miguel Felipi Neri del Corona. Please also inform Señora Neri del Corona, if possible, that son, Tranquilino, is with me.
"CARTER."

It was not until the following morning that he received replies to his messages, and we will give them here. The reply to the first one was:

"Gentleman inquired about has passed away. Have no information as to remainder of your message.
"AROYODIENTE, Licenciado."

To the second came this:

"Location of hacienda inquired about, State of Puebla, near Tlanaquitla."

This message was signed by the minister and utterly ignored the latter part of the message. To the third one, that addressed to the chief of police of Mexico, this reply was received:

"Condemned to death two years ago last March for killing Manuel Blanco. Sentence commuted to life imprisonment. Prisoner escaped nine months ago. No information present address señora. Nothing to add by letter, but will answer questions, if you have any to ask."

Altogether Nick did not feel that he had gained very much more than he now knew the location of the hacienda. He had also learned, to his sorrow, of the death of an old friend.

But he called Chick to him as soon as the replies to his messages came, and said to him:

"Chick, take the first train out for Mexico City. Go to the chief of police and get all the information you can about José Corona and his family, and also his estate, if he really committed one, which I begin to doubt, for Mexico is not in the habit of commuting sentences unless they are well satisfied that justice has miscarried. Go to the Hacienda de las Aguas, near Tlanaquitla, in Puebla. Find the administrador, named Pancho, and a woman named Annette. Tell them that Tranquilino is here with me in good care, and get their stories. Then wire me, in cipher, the entire facts. That's all."

And now we must return for a moment to the afternoon of the preceding day, Sunday, when Patsy and Tranquilino returned from their ride, for it had been in one way at least a disappointing one.

They had not been able to find the house, or even one that answered to the description of it, into which Tranquilino had been taken by his abductor.

There was no such house anywhere near where the boy supposed it to be. At least, there was not one with "golden balls" over the front door; not one which the boy recognized.

After that, one day succeeded another while Nick awaited information from Chick, for although he believed that the youngster had given a very fair description of his route up-town in the carriage with his captor, and although Nick himself had searched that part of the city where the pawnbroker's establishment should be situated, he could find no place which seemed likely to be the one which Don "Ribera" had entered with the boy.

Then something happened which startled the detective into renewed activity regarding the affairs of his young charge. Tranquilino disappeared!

He had been permitted to sit, unguarded for a few moments, on the front steps of the detective's house, and when, a few minutes later, Mrs. Peters went to the door to call him inside, he was gone.

There had been no outcry whatever.

During the time when Tranquilino was seated on the steps, the door behind him was open and Joseph was within sound of his voice if he had cried out. Moreover, Joseph was certain that the lad had not been out of his sight more than three or four minutes, when he disappeared. In passing the door inside the house, Joseph had glanced out and seen the boy seated there; three or four minutes later he had passed the door again and noticed that the boy was gone.

He had rushed outside then and looked up and down the avenue, but Tranquilino was nowhere in sight, although it did not seem to Joseph that there had been time for him to get to either of the nearest corners, nor was there a vehicle in sight at the moment in which he might have been a passenger.

Thinking that Lino had reentered the house, Joseph

had run back into it, only to discover that he was not there.

Now, it stood to reason, because of two indisputable facts, that the boy had not wandered away himself. One was that he could not have gotten out of sight so quickly without assistance, and the other was that he had been told not to leave the steps, and thus far he had never disobeyed an injunction given him in his new home.

"Poor little kid," said the detective to Patsy. "It seems that he is somehow the pivotal point in this affair. And, Patsy, I believe the little fellow was right about that pawnbroker part of it. I want you to go to the license bureau and find out what loan office has been located in that part of the city that has lately given up business, or removed to another address. It is my opinion that we will have to trace the boy from there; or, rather, that it is the only clue we have to get on the trace of the man who must have spirited him away."

"And, chief——" began Patsy.

"Yes?"

"Has it occurred to you that there is only one way in which the boy could have been gotten out of the way so quickly?"

"Yes, it has, Patsy. But tell me what your idea is."

"An automobile."

"Of course. But that isn't all of it, is it?"

"No?"

"Well?"

"It has seemed to me that there must have been a person in that automobile who was known to Tranquilino and who had only to call to him or motion to him to induce him to run from the steps out to the car."

"Sure, Patsy—but his mother would be the only person who would have that influence over him. Eh?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE'S STRANGEST CASE.

Nick Carter had not thought of that solution of the mystery until he mentioned it himself to Patsy; but like a flash it came over him then that nobody but the mother of the boy could have called him from his seat on the steps and induced him to enter an automobile, without his first giving some sort of an alarm.

Tranquilino, according to his own story, had been raised on the hacienda, and had rarely gone away from it. He was only seven years old, and the likelihood was that the only faces in all the world that were familiar to him were his mother's and those of the servants about the hacienda.

It was not at all likely that one of the servants was already in the city of New York; nor yet was it likely, when one stopped to reason it out, that his mother would call him away from the protection that had been afforded him, in such a surreptitious manner.

Altogether, the whole affair was becoming extremely puzzling.

It was that same day, in the afternoon—the tenth day after the departure of Chick—that a long message was received from the first assistant, in cipher. When translated, it read:

"Pancho was shot down from ambush the same evening of the disappearance of the boy from his home. Annette disappeared at the same time, and nothing is known of her. Nothing known of present address of boy's mother. People on hacienda strangely reticent because do not trust a stranger, particularly Americans. Can learn nothing of details of crime of boy's father save that one Manuel Blanco was killed, supposedly by him, conviction followed, sentence was commuted, prisoner escaped, wife doubtless went to meet him somewhere, supposedly in United States, because of letter delivered to her by unknown person. Reported cause of shooting of Blanco was jealousy. My idea is that family history has something to do with entire affair, and am looking it up. Don Ribera Agramonte, brother of boy's mother, said to be in Europe many years representing mining interests here. There is also a sister somewhere."

Thus stood the strange case which had arisen entirely out of Nick Carter's encounter with a lost and desolate boy that rainy night. And now followed a period of utter mystery which all the ability of the detective and his assistants did not lessen, although they did everything in their power to disclose it.

Patsy could find no trace whatever of the supposed pawnbroker and his house, and it was decided that Tranquilino had been mistaken as to locality, or that Nick had not been able to follow his description correctly.

The boy himself had utterly disappeared from the moment Joseph last saw him seated on the steps in front of the house.

Chick, in Mexico, had discovered nothing that was not incorporated in his first message, and it seemed to Nick that he had found the boy only to lose him again.

It seemed almost incredible to the detective that a seven-year-old boy could be spirited away from his own front steps as Tranquilino had been, and disappear so utterly; but the fact remained that it had happened.

And the more the detective thought about it, the more determined he became in the idea that nobody but the mother of the boy could have accomplished the act, and have kept it shrouded in so great mystery afterward.

He reasoned the case out in this way:

"The boy's father, being accused of murder, was sentenced to death; his sentence was commuted; the man escaped, and was, therefore, a fugitive from justice who would be returned to Mexico on demand to live out his sentence, wherever he might be found. He had communicated with his wife in secret, and she had gone to him. The man called Don Ribera had been sent to take the boy by stealth to his parents. In New York the man had doubtless visited the house where the boy was left alone for a few moments in order to get the address of the parents. Later, the boy, for some reason, had been left standing alone in a doorway, had run away the moment his guardian's back was turned, and so become lost. Then the detective had found him—and the rest we know. The boy's father and mother, terrorized lest Don José should be returned to Mexico as a fugitive from justice, had sought him in secret after Nick found him; had finally discovered where he was staying, and then the mother, driving past Nick's house, had succeeded in attracting Tranquilino's attention, and he had run out to her, only to be taken away into hiding with his parents."

That is the manner in which the detective figured it out in his own mind.

The theories were all based upon conjecture only, of course; but the reason behind them was the one fixed belief in the mind of the detective that the boy would not have gone away with any one *but* his own mother without raising an alarm.

He had gone away without calling out, and, therefore, it must have been his mother.

If he was with his mother, it was all right; and doubtless her own reasons for remaining hidden were sufficient unto herself, since she must believe them entirely necessary for the safety of her husband, the boy's father.

And so Nick decided that Tranquilino was with his parents.

Then came the press of other business, and the case of Tranquilino was allowed to lapse.

But, mind you, it was not because the detective abandoned it for any other reason than that he firmly believed the boy to be with his father and mother.

Chick returned from Mexico and told in words the same information he had sent by wire, adding only a little general information which did not seem to bear on the boy's end of the case at all.

Annette had disappeared the same night that the boy was taken away. There was no explanation for that disappearance save the one that she had also gone to join her master and mistress at their place of hiding, to which the boy had now at last been taken.

Pancho had been shot from ambush that night, but a peon who worked on the place had afterward been accused of the crime, had confessed it, and had been executed; so the killing of Pancho was supposed by the detectives to have no connection with the other affair.

And then, more than two months after the night when Nick found Tranquilino in the rain on Broadway, there came a letter from the chief of police of Mexico, to Nick Carter; a letter which related to a different matter entirely, but which contained the following postscript:

"I had almost forgotten to tell you something which I believe will interest you as bearing upon a matter you telegraphed to me about some time ago. I refer to the Hacienda de las Aguas and its owner, and his family. You will remember that you wired me to the effect that the boy, Tranquilino, was with you, so, of course, you know that he has been brought back to his home by his mother. As I told you in my message at the time of your request for information, the father had escaped from prison, and, although we had used every effort to trace him, it was unavailing. It seems that in making his escape he was obliged to make his way on foot to the coast, and that in doing so he contracted a fever which ultimately killed him. His widow reports that he died in New York City, and is buried in one of the cemeteries there. The boy is sole heir to the vast estate, which is very rich. He is now probably the richest youngster in the republic. I don't know why the case interested you, but here are all the facts I know about it."

Nick Carter read that postscript through several times. It interested him, and it should have satisfied him; but it did not. There seemed to him to be something about it which did not ring true.

He tried to dismiss it from his mind, but often it seemed to him as if he could see the beautiful, small face of Tranquilino looking up at him as the boy had

looked that night in the rain, appealing to him to go to his aid.

And, fortunately, the principal part of the letter from the chief in Mexico supplied the detective with an excuse to go there, although he might have avoided the trip and have furnished the information sought by the chief in another manner.

But he determined to make the trip; and while he was there, to pay a visit to the Hacienda de las Aguas. He would see Tranquilino again, anyhow, and that was of itself sufficient reason; but he would also hear from the boy himself, an explanation of his disappearance from the front steps of the detective's house.

So Nick Carter went to Mexico.

It was a week after the arrival of the detective in Mexico when he left the train at the station nearest the hacienda—Tlanaquitla, it was called—and, having secured a horse and a guide, set out on the twenty-miles ride to the hacienda.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he came in sight of the numerous white buildings where he expected to find Tranquilino, and he pulled his horse up suddenly while still more than a mile away from it.

He remained silent so long a time after that, that his guide finally spoke to him.

"Has the señor forgotten something?" he asked respectfully; and, with sudden inspiration, the detective replied:

"I want you to ride back to Tlanaquitla and to take the train from there to the city of Mexico for me. You will carry a written message to the chief of police in that city, and you will permit nobody but him to see it. Will you go at once?"

"Without stopping here to rest, señor?"

"Yes."

"*May him.* I will go."

Nick took a sheet from his note-book and wrote upon it this message:

"Please do me the favor to keep this man with you till my return, but don't let him suppose that he is a prisoner. He is not. I merely want him absent.

"CARTER."

This he placed in a blank envelope he found in his pocket, and addressed it to the chief; then he sat his horse and watched the man until he disappeared beyond a rise in the plain; and then he told himself:

"Now, I wonder why I took the trouble to do that? Only because the man knows my name and that I have seemingly determined to visit this hacienda under an assumed one. But why should I care to do that?"

He did not try to answer the questions he had asked himself, but rode onward toward the buildings presently.

He had the feeling that some sort of a surprise awaited him there. He had the intuitive "hunch" that he should appear there incognito, although he could not have told why it occurred to him.

His ostensible purpose in going there was to see the boy; that only. But down deep in his heart he now realized for the first time that he had all along been impelled to make the trip by the latent belief, now admitted to himself for the first time, that there was still a mystery about the place which for the boy's sake should be revealed.

At all events, he had determined in that moment when he stopped his horse and sent the guide away who knew him, that he would keep his identity a secret at least until Tranquilino should recognize him and proclaim him. After that—well, after that it would doubtless be all right all around.

When, a little later, he rode among the cypress-trees which surrounded the rambling, one-storied residence which covered almost as much ground as Madison Square Garden, in New York, and dismounted before the door, and when a servant came forward to receive him and take his horse, it was Tranquilino himself who came forward toward him from the doorway.

And even in that first quick glance that the detective had of the boy, he discovered that a great change had somehow been wrought in the little lad. He was thin, and worn, and sallow. The spirit seemed to have gone out of his face and eyes; and then, as he stepped forward and extended his little hand toward the detective with a gesture of old-fashioned courtesy, Nick noticed that there was not a trace of recognition of his own features in the boy's countenance.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER AND DEEPER MYSTERY.

It seemed impossible to Nick Carter that a boy so bright as Tranquilino had been should have forgotten him so soon. It was incredible; and yet, save for one little flash that he thought he discovered when the boy first started forward, there was not the slightest sign upon his countenance that he had the faintest memory of the man who had picked him up in the rain in New York and carried him home and cared for him.

Nick took the cold little hand in his own, and bent forward toward him; he was about to call him by name and ask him if he did not remember, when they were interrupted.

A man—a gentleman, according to all the recognized rules of outward appearance—came through the doorway and advanced toward the detective, also with his hand extended, for that is the universal method of greeting among equals, in Mexico.

The man was tall and dark, and, so far as Nick could remember, the imperfect description given by Tranquilino of the man who had run away with him, might have been Don Ribera himself—or, at least, the man who had so called himself; and there appeared in the doorway immediately behind the man a woman of surprising beauty, whom Nick instantly cast for the part of Tranquilino's mother.

But in the meantime the man was speaking to him, bidding him welcome to the hacienda, for nowhere in the world is the outward appearance of welcome so cordially extended as it is to a traveler in Mexico, especially if he appears on horseback, and is many miles from a *fonda* or a railroad.

The conversation that followed was, of course, in the Spanish language, but we will give it all in English as literally translated as possible.

"Good day to you, señor," said the man, as he extended his hand, which the detective accepted. "You are welcome. The house and all it contents are at your disposition. I am at present the administrator of this estate for the Señora Neri del Corona y Agramonte. And you, sir?"

"My name is Nicholas. I am an American," replied the detective.

"Thank you. This young gentleman," continued the administrator, "is the señora's son; the real proprietor of the estate, when he comes of age. Will you enter, sir?"

He led the way into a wide, cool room, and here the beautiful woman came forward and also bade Nick welcome.

"You have come in good time, sir," she said. "Dinner will be served at five. I am Señora Corona. You have traveled far, sir?"

"Only from Tlanaquitla, señora; and I am afraid that I have no good excuse for imposing upon your hospitality."

"It is not an imposition, sir; it is a pleasure, particularly if you are an American. I was lately in your country, and was very much pleased with it."

"Indeed?" asked Nick, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes, señor."

It is not necessarily a part of this story to relate all the things that were said during the next hour—the things that were required by politeness and courtesy; but at the end of that time the detective was shown to a room, where he was told to consider everything as his own, and then he was left to himself.

But as soon as he was alone he walked to a window and stood there looking out, while to himself he was thinking:

"There is a powder-mine under this place somewhere. I wonder what it is all about? And that boy——"

He stopped suddenly, for at that instant he caught sight of the boy himself, just as he was disappearing between a double row of trees, mounted on a pony that was scarcely larger than he was.

Nick's resolution was taken instantly.

Seizing his hat, he hurried out of the house, and, skirting it, found the avenue of trees along which he had seen the boy disappear, and, believing that he was unobserved, he hurried along it, hoping that he would encounter the boy somewhere presently.

He remembered what Tranquilino had told him about a trail which led to the two springs of water for which the hacienda was named; he thought this must be it, and he hurried forward expectantly.

But he traversed the entire distance before he caught the boy, who was seated upon the stone steps of the house that was built over one of the springs.

Tranquilino raised his eyes as Nick approached him; but he did not evince any interest whatever in the coming encounter. He merely dropped them again and sighed.

The detective paused directly in front of him, only a few feet distant, and waited in silence for a time, hoping that Tranquilino would speak; but the lad did not offer to do so.

"Tranquilino," said Nick at last, speaking in a low tone, "have you forgotten me?"

There was a perceptible pause before the boy replied. Then he said, and calmly:

"I never saw you before, señor."

"What!" exclaimed Nick, astounded by this cool repudiation of their acquaintance. "Do you not remember me?"

"No, sir. I never saw you before," was the expressionless response.

"Is it possible? Look at me, Tranquilino."

"Yes, sir. I am looking."

"Have you forgotten Mr. Carter?"

"I do not know a Mr. Carter, señor."

"Have you forgotten the man who found you in the streets of New York, in a storm, and who took you to his own house and cared for you."

"You must excuse me, sir," said Tranquilino, rising—and Nick thought he had turned even paler and more sallow than before; "but you are a stranger to me. I do not know you."

The detective watched the boy in amazement as he walked away slowly, going toward his pony; and he would have mounted and ridden away had not Nick overtaken him.

"Well, at least," he said, smiling, "even if I am a stranger, you will not refuse to talk with me, will you?"

"I have been told that I must not talk to strangers," was the low reply.

"But I am a guest in your mother's house. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"The lady is your mother, is she not?"

For just one briefest instant the boy's eyes were raised to Nick's, and in that instant the detective encountered such a flash of utter hatred as he had never seen in young eyes before; which can never be detected save only in the eyes of the Latin races; but the boy replied in the same monotone that seemed entirely without interest in anything:

"Yes, sir."

"Was it your mama who took you away from my house in New York, Tranquilino?" was the detective's next question.

"I was never in your house in New York. I don't know you, sir."

"Tranquilino, what has happened to you?"

"Nothing has happened to me, señor."

"Why do you deny your acquaintance with me? Is that the proper way to be grateful for a service that has been done to you?"

For an instant the boy's lips trembled; but he replied with that same stilted statement:

"I do not know you at all, sir."

The detective thought to attempt another method of breaking through the inexplicable barrier established by Tranquilino: and he asked, as if he did not know:

"Where is Pancho, Lino?"

Tears started to the boy's eyes, then, and he turned his face away to hide them: but he replied as calmly as before:

"Pancho is dead."

"Indeed. What happened to him?"

"He was killed."

"By whom?"

"I do not know; a peon, I was told."

"You were not here when he was killed?"

"No."

"Where were you?"

"I was away, traveling with—with my—with my mother."

Now, in all his talks with Tranquilino before that day Nick had never heard him refer to his mother by any other name than mama, and he made a mental note of the fact. It was more or less significant, he thought.

"Where is Annette? By the way, was not her name Anita, instead of Annette?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"She is dead, too."

"You shock me, Tranquilino. Are all your friends dead, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

It was astonishing the manner in which he voiced that reply. It was so utterly hopeless in its expression. There was so much tragedy concealed behind the monotone in which it was uttered. It was as if the last friend he had had in the world had died and he were left alone, utterly.

"Did your papa die, too, little chap?"

"Yes;" the reply was scarcely to be heard at all.

"Where did he die?"

"I don't know."

"You did not see him?"

"No."

"Who told you that he was dead?"

"They told me!" the reply was almost fierce this time, although it was still monotonous in its character.

"Who do you mean by 'They'?"

"That man you shook hands with; that fiend. Don Patricio Bernal." There was no mistaking the fierceness of the reply this time. Nick began to believe that he was making ground.

"Who is the other one of 'They'?" he asked softly.

"The wo—my mother." Here the first part of the reply was as fierce as the other one had been, but the latter part of it was again a monotone.

"Is that what you call her now? Mother?" asked Nick.

"Yes. I call her mother."

"Don't you call her mama any more?"

"No; I never call her mama. I never will call her mama. She is not my mama. She is not even my mother. I don't know who she is. She looks like my mama, but she is *not* my mama inside. She is as bad as he is. They are both bad, and I shall be killed for telling you of it. Why do you torture me? Go away! *Go away!*"

Tranquilino suddenly burst into a passion of tears; and before Nick could stop him he leaped to his feet, ran to his pony, sprang into the saddle, and galloped away as fast as the little animal could carry him. Only he did not go toward the house, but in the opposite direction.

And that was fortunate, for he had barely disappeared before Don Patricio appeared upon the scene, coming from the opposite direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRAFTY FOE.

The don was on horseback. A Mexican never walks if there is a horse to carry him.

He waved his hand gaily toward the detective when he discovered him, and as he rode up remarked:

"Hola, señor. Had I guessed that you were here I would have brought out a horse for you. However, you Americans are fond of walking; no?"

"Quite so," replied Nick.

Don Patricio dismounted and seated himself beside Nick. Then he said, apparently without interest in the subject:

"I really came in search of Tranquilino. I was under the impression that he came this way."

"He was here," replied Nick; "but he has gone."

"Gone? He has instructions from the señora not to ride beyond the springs. Where did he go?"

Nick jerked his head in the direction that Tranquilino had taken.

"So? Oh, well, it will not go far. We will wait here and chat together until he returns. You found him here when you arrived?"

"Yes. He was sitting here on the steps."

"You talked with him, señor?"

"Yes."

"He is a wonderfully bright boy about some things and remarkably stupid about others. Did I find him interesting. Did you not, also?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I did, Don Patricio. He seemed rather more—er—stupid, as you have expressed it."

"Ah; doubtless he had one of his fits of moroseness on him. He has been so at times since the death of his father; although that is strange, too. He had not seen his father since he was five years old."

"His father is dead?" asked Nick.

"Ah; you did not guess it? That is strange. It was very sad; most sad, indeed. There was some trouble he had with a gentleman who had been attentive to the señora before he married her. It is a sad tale. I will not trouble you with it. But Tranquilino's father was sent to prison for it."

"And did he die there?" asked Nick.

"Oh, no. He escaped. He somehow made his way to your country—to New York, in fact. He died there of some kind of fever he had contracted during his prison life, or while he was escaping. He sent for the señora and the boy, however, before he died."

"So he was fortunate in having his wife and child with him before he died, was he?"

"Well, no. There was a hitch somewhere. I do not know about it exactly. The señora went to him first, I have been told. Afterward they sent for the boy, but he was lost somewhere; he ran away from the man who came to fetch him, in fact, and disappeared for a long time. Then—but I am boring you, señor."

"Not at all. I find it very interesting."

"Well, it was rather remarkable. His mother was driving through the streets of the city one day in an automobile she had purchased, and suddenly she saw Tranquilino seated upon some steps in front of a house she was passing. She called to the boy, of course, almost fainting with delight as she did so; and he, hearing her and seeing her, ran out to her at once. She opened the door of the automobile and the boy sprang inside. It was rather remarkable that she should find him in just that manner, don't you think so?"

"Very."

"In such a great city as New York, too."

"Very remarkable indeed. How long a time had he been lost?"

"Oh, a long time. His father was already dead. A favorite servant who had contracted the fever from Don José, had also died. Tranquilino was very fond of her, and his young heart seemed almost broken. The boy had really been different since then, that old me, although I did not know him till after that."

"It is a sad story," said the detective, rising, and

inwardly wondering just what the motive could be in telling him all this. It did not occur to the detective that these people had guessed who he was. He was to discover that later. "You are not a Mexican, are you?" he added.

"No; I am a Spaniard."

They were silent after that during several moments, and then the don remarked:

"By the way, señor, I am directed by the señora to do all that can be done to make your stay with us pleasant, and to request that you remain with us as long as it suits your convenience to do so. And, really, sir, I think it would be a pleasure to the señora if you would stay a few days. We see very little company here, you know."

"That is kind of you. Perhaps I shall take advantage of it."

"Thank you. There are horses to ride. There is deer-shooting on the mountain now. If you would care to indulge in a little hunting I shall be most happy to go with you at any time. We have dogs and horses and beaters who are accustomed to the mountains. Ah! Here is Tranquilino, returning. Come here, niño!" he called out, the word niño meaning boy.

Tranquilino rode up to them and dismounted.

The same stolid expression of utter indifference and abject lassitude that Nick had noticed about him first had returned to his face. All traces of his recent passion had disappeared.

"Tranquilino," said the don, and he managed to infuse a considerate sort of tenderness into the tones he used, "I have heard you say that some time you would like to go upon the mountain that is called the White Lady. The señor has expressed a desire to go hunting"—Nick had expressed no such desire; he had not even acquiesced in the suggestion about it—"and I have no doubt he would be willing that you should accompany us when we go."

"Are you going?" asked the boy, with an accent on the pronoun.

"Most certainly."

"Then I do not care to go, thank you."

A bitter taunt accompanied by oaths could not have been more insulting in its meaning than were those quiet words spoken by the boy; and as he uttered them he turned away and sprang again upon his pony. Then he galloped up the trail toward the house.

The don flushed perceptibly; but he laughed, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, said:

"I do not understand the boy's dislike for me, señor. Possibly you could suggest an explanation?"

"I am afraid not. Have you known him long?" replied Nick, to whom recurred the thought he had had when he first saw the don—that he might be the Don Ribera of the boy's abduction.

"No; only since I have been here."

"Then you have not been here long?"

"Two months. I have barely begun to operate the estate as yet. There used to be a man here named Pancho, which is the short name for Francisco, like your Dick is for Richard, but he was shot, unfortunately."

"Fortunately I should suggest, in your case, sir."

"Oh, no. I should have superceded him in any case."

"There seems to have been a fatality attending many persons associated with the hacienda, señor," remarked the detective dryly.

"It does seem so. Ah, well. Shall we return to the house? The señora is likely to want me at this hour."

So they walked back toward the house together, the don leading the horse he had ridden out there.

Nick went directly to his own room again, and there he made a discovery that filled him with a new amazement.

As he approached the door of his room he thought he saw a figure flitting away from it; and when he entered it a moment later, he found upon his bed a sheet of paper upon which had been printed in rudely made letters, in pencil, these words:

"Forgive me, señor. I must not know you. I love you."

It was in Spanish, of course, but the above is a literal translation of the words the detective discovered there; and he folded the paper and put it in one of his pockets.

There was no doubt that it was Tranquilino whom he had seen escaping from the room, and the boy had gone there to leave the message he had printed with so much care. He was only seven years old, and had not learned to write.

But the message was in a way a revelation to the detective.

It explained in part what he had scarcely comprehended before; which was that the boy had somehow been terrorized into denying his acquaintance with the detective; but that was not the significant part of it. The significance was this:

The man who was called Don Patricio and the woman whom Tranquilino declined to call mama were perfectly well informed regarding Nick Carter's identity, notwithstanding the pains he had taken to conceal it.

They knew that he was Nick Carter. They knew that he was from New York. They knew that he had come there to see Tranquilino. They knew him to be the man who had rescued Tranquilino from the storm; they knew that he was disposed to be their enemy; or, at least, that he was determined to be the boy's friend.

That was the significance of the note Nick had found; but there was even more to it.

The question naturally arose, *how did they know these things?*

And there was but one answer to that question. *Either the man or the woman or both of them had recognized him because one or both of them had seen him before.*

If that were true there was only one place where they could have encountered him, and that was in New York. And that idea harked him back again to the proposition that Don Patricio and the Don "Ribera" of Tranquilino's abduction were the same.

"They are watching me," thought Nick. "That Spaniard saw me go down the avenue of trees after the boy, or was told that I had done so, and followed, in order that we might not talk too much together.

"And that proposed hunting-expedition," he thought again a moment later. "I think I can see through that now. He wants to get me out on the mountain-side where I can be conveniently shot; which shooting would be reported an accident.

"It is plain that I am in a nest of vipers of some sort; but what does it mean? What is the game?"

And then the words of the boy recurred to him, when Tranquilino had cried out:

"She is not my mama. She is not even my mother. I don't know who she is. She looks like my mama but she is not my mama inside. She is as bad as he is. They are both bad, and I shall be killed for telling you of it."

"Had the boy meant that the woman was really not his mother, or was it that she had changed toward him somehow, and that his love for her had turned to hatred?

"I have got to discover what this dread secret is," thought the detective, "and I must work rapidly, for there is not much time. I cannot remain here very long. Only I begin to think now that they do not intend that I shall ever leave the hacienda."

A few minutes later, upon looking out at his window again, he saw the don and the señora ride away together on their horses, and, thinking it a good opportunity for further talk with Tranquilino, he sought the boy.

But though he sought everywhere for more than an hour, until darkness had fallen he could not find him.

And then the don and the señora returned.

CHAPTER IX.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

Tranquilino did not appear again that evening, and Nick thought it best to make no inquiry concerning him. He passed the greater part of the evening in company with his hostess and her administrator, during which they made no mention of their late ride or of the boy.

Nick Carter that evening discovered that Señora Corona was not only beautiful, but that also she could be extremely fascinating if she chose to be.

She spoke English fluently, French like a Parisian, and several other languages besides her own, which was, of course, Spanish; she also disclosed a cosmopolitan knowledge of Europe which surprised the detective, and she displayed a startling familiarity with every capitol from St. Petersburg to Madrid.

Also she sang wonderfully well, accompanying herself with the piano or the guitar, as the fancy took her; and when Nick retired at last he could not deny to himself that he had passed an extremely interesting and withal pleasant evening.

But sober thought within his own room convinced him of two things; one was that the señora had done her utmost to fascinate him that night, and the other was that Don Patricio was already a slave to her fascinations, and did not look with unmixed favor upon her efforts with Nick Carter.

And again, as he retired to his bed, he asked himself: "What is the game?"

It was Nick Carter's habit never to lock the door of his sleeping-room when he was inside it. Long practise had taught him to awaken at the slightest suggestion of intrusion upon such a place, and he did not make any exception of his rule that night.

He thought he had been sleeping some time when

he was roused to consciousness by the belief that his door had been pushed open softly.

He waited and listened, for he could see nothing at all; and presently he was aware of a light breathing somewhere near him, as if a person had approached the bed and was standing very near it.

And then he was startled and amazed by hearing a whispered voice call his name.

"Señor Carter!" it said; and he knew then that the words were spoken by Tranquilino.

"My poor boy!" he replied, also speaking softly. "What is it? Come here to my arms."

And in another moment he was holding tightly against him the sobbing, quivering figure of Tranquilino, who clung to the detective as if he had never had a friend before, and whose sobs came so rapidly and from so deep a place that he could do nothing else than utter them.

But at last, after many minutes, during which Nick murmured words of love and care into his ears, he succeeded in controlling himself; and then he reached up and put his arms around Nick's neck, and snuggled down against the detective's neck, and for a long time he kept perfectly still, scarcely breathing, he was so quiet.

And Nick waited. He knew that it was best for him to do so.

He understood perfectly well that the boy had come to him for a purpose, but it was best not to attempt to hurry its unfolding.

It came at last, and without warning.

"I had to come, Señor Carter," he said. "I was afraid they would kill me to-night."

"Hush, child, you must not have such fears. Why should they kill you?"

"Oh, they have me so. I don't know any other reason, for I have never harmed either of them. Only I would if I could. I would kill them, yes, I would, just as I know that they killed my mama and my papa."

"Tranquilino, what are you talking about? Is not that lady your mama?"

"No. She is *not* my mama. I told you that to-day, down by the springs."

"I know you did, but I did not suppose you meant what you said then."

"I did mean it, every word of it. And, oh, I was so ashamed that I talked to you as I did; but the man—Don Patricio he calls himself now, although he used to be Don Ribera, and he is not really either of them, I think—he told me that if I did not deny you, and that if I told you anything at all, he would not only kill me, but he would kill you, too. I don't think I would care so much if he should kill me; but if he should kill *you* it would break my heart, for you are the only friend I have got left in all the world."

"You poor child. Well, I will be your friend till the end of the world, if need be."

"I knew you would, and I denied you to-day. Do you forgive me?"

"Yes, Lino. I understood."

"But how could you?"

"I don't know; but I did. And now you must tell me all about it."

"I will. That is why I came here to you to-night. Did you get my letter?"

"Your letter? Oh, yes. Of course I got it. It was a very nice letter, too. I was very glad to get it, for it told me that my little Tranquilino loves me."

"I *do* love you, Señor Carter, very much. And I hope you will love me, for nobody else loves me at all now."

"Nonsense, Lino; many love you."

"No; they are all gone. My papa is dead; my mama is dead; Pancho is dead; Annette is dead—and I think that that man killed them all. Or, if he did not, he made somebody else do it for him. He is a very wicked man, and he wants my papa's estate. I have heard him say so to that woman who makes me call her my mother."

"Who is she, if she is not really your mother, Lino?"

"I do not know."

"Does she look like your mother?"

"Oh, yes; she looks like my mama used to look—sometimes. I suppose other people would think so, only it is not at all the same to me. It is the eyes and the smile that are different."

Nick recalled something that Chick had once told him in a telegram, and he asked:

"Have you got an aunt, Tranquilino? Did your mama have a sister?"

"I don't know."

"Did you never hear her talk about a sister and say that she was good or bad, just the same as she talked about her brother and told you how good he was?"

"No."

"And you say that this Don Patricio is the same man who ran away with you from here before I found you in New York?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me, won't you, how it came about that you ran away from my house in New York as you did. I was greatly troubled about you."

"Oh, I knew you would feel badly, señor, but I could not help it. I was sitting on the steps, where Mrs. Peters had left me, when one of those horseless wagons came along, and there was a lady in it who raised her veil and called to me. I thought it was my mama, and I ran down the steps and out to the big wagon, and she opened the door and I jumped in, and then it ran away with me. Only I did not know it was not my mama for a long time; not until we had gone a long way and got out of the wagon and gone into a house. And then I saw the man there who took me away from here and who left me that night in the rain. Then they gave me something that made me sleep, and then they brought me back here. And that is all I know about it, except the things I have heard them talking about when I have listened to them; and I have done that as often as I could, too."

"Tell me what you have heard them talking about, Lino."

"Oh, about the hacienda and the money in the banks. I don't know what that means, but it is what I have heard them say; and she is going to be his wife when her mourning for my papa is over. I heard them both say that. And they have talked about killing me, too. I have heard them do so."

"Tell me what they said about that, Lino."

"The man wants to give me something in my food to make me die, but the woman says no. He asked her what difference it would make in the end, and told her that the hacienda would be hers, anyhow, but she said no again. That is all I know about it. Only I am afraid to eat the things I like sometimes because there might be something in the food to make me sleep again, and maybe not wake up any more."

"Poor child. What a burden to be borne by seven years."

"When I saw you ride up to the house on the horse, I thought I would die of joy; but I did not dare to say a word or make a sound to let you know it. I was very much ashamed of myself for acting so, but I was afraid they would kill you. I am afraid now that they will."

"Do you mean that they knew I was coming here before I arrived?"

"Oh, yes, they knew it several days ago; I don't know exactly how long ago it was; only they did not know just what day you would arrive."

"How did they learn that I was coming at all?"

"I don't know. It was in a letter."

"Where was the letter from?"

"New York, I think they said. I am not sure."

"Tranquilino, I must find out some things which you cannot tell me because you are not old enough to know; but I want you to help me find a person who can."

"Yes, sir. But how can I do it?"

"Pancho was always good to you, wasn't he?"

"Yes; oh, yes."

"And Annette?"

"Yes."

"Did either of them have any brothers or sisters, or father or mother who is still here?"

"I don't think so."

"Isn't there any old servant around the place who was here when your papa and mama were both here?"

"I don't know, but I don't think so. Since we came back all the old servants have been sent away or have died. Three of them have died."

"More deaths? Tell me how they died, if you know."

"I do not know. A strange sickness, I have heard some of the people say; and they shook their heads when they said it."

"Is there nobody left here whom you knew before you went to New York and found me?"

"There is Secundino."

"Who is he?"

"I am afraid that he isn't anybody at all. He is a strange old man who never speaks to anybody except me, and then only a word or two. He is loco, you know."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know that, either. He lives out on the mountain somewhere, I have been told, but I don't know where, only that it is way up near the snow-line. That must be very far up, isn't it? I can see the snow-line sometimes from my window."

"Yes; it is a long way. Do you think there is anybody here at the hacienda who could tell me where Secundino lives, Lino?"

"I don't know; but I will ask; only I forgot."

"What did you forget?"

"That now that I have come here to your room to tell you all about it, I cannot go back to mine again. I have got to stay right with you all the time now, for if I do not, if you leave me again, they will surely kill me. I know it. And if they find us together,

they will kill both of us. But I am safe with you, am I not, sir?"

"I will protect you, Lino. And you shall not leave me again, no matter what comes."

"Thank you, sir. I knew you would do that."

CHAPTER X.

AN ESCAPE IN THE NIGHT.

Nick Carter had no doubt that the boy was right about the danger in which he stood at the hands of at least one of his enemies, he who was called Don Patricio. He had himself seen enough of the man already to realize that he was one of those smooth and oily individuals who will laugh with you while he administers poison in your soup, or will greet you with one hand while he stabs you with the other.

But concerning the woman the detective was by no means so thoroughly convinced.

It was not supposable that a rank impostor, such as the boy's testimony would make her out to be would dare to present herself at the hacienda where there must still be very many people who had known the señora of the estate by sight for many years; at least as long as she had been the wife of Don José and had lived there.

For those big haciendas in Mexico are wonderful things in their way; and this one particularly, located near the base of that famous extinct volcano of Ixtaccihuatl—The White Lady—contains more than eighty thousand acres of land. And there are whole villages located upon it, and thousands of persons get their living off it, and all are subservient to the hacendero, or owner, of the estate, in much the same manner that serfs in Russia were formerly subject to the owners of their land.

Therefore Nick was compelled to take the testimony of the boy with some reserve, although he could not doubt Tranquilino's sincerity.

But there was always the likelihood that the influence of this stranger over her had altered her manner toward her son; had changed her so that she was not like the mother he had known and loved.

The detective remained silent for a long time after the last statement made by the boy; but at last he broke the silence by whispering:

"Lino, do you know where the horses are kept? I have had no time to look about the place since my arrival. I was leaving all that till to-morrow; but now it seems rather as if we ought to get away from here as soon as possible, on your account."

"Yes, señor. I know where the horses are kept."

"If we should dress now could you guide me to that place without disturbing anybody in the house, do you think?"

"Yes, señor."

"But you will have to return to your own room to get your clothing. That is too bad, for you may disturb somebody in doing that."

"No, señor. I brought them here with me in my arms."

"Did you? You are more thoughtful than I supposed."

"I knew that I would never return to that room again," Tranquilino said calmly, speaking as one upon whom full and entire conviction had descended.

Again the detective was thoughtful for a time.

He did not like the idea of fleeing away in the night from his enemies, but for the sake of the boy there seemed no other possible course to pursue.

Tranquilino, although much older and wiser than his years, was, nevertheless, a baby in many respects, and now Nick realized that he would not be safe for a moment in the power of Don Patricio. The detective would be unable to protect him without declaring open warfare against the two people who were his hosts; and if he were to do that it were better that he should first transport the boy to a place of safety.

But where was there such a place?

Plainly there was only one to be thought of, and that was to seek a hiding-place on the mountain, the home of Secundino, if it could be found.

It would not do for the detective to attempt as yet to take Tranquilino out of the country, for in the eye of the law that woman was his mother and his natural guardian, and she would lose no time in appealing to the Rurales to overtake and recapture him, if Nick attempted to take him away.

To attempt to make Tlanaquitla and to go thence by rail to Puebla or the City of Mexico would only be to invite more trouble for Tranquilino than was already apparent.

But to escape from the hacienda with him seemed to be imperative, nevertheless.

"Do you suppose, Tranquilino, that Secundino would be your friend if we could find him?" he asked, after a little.

"I am the only one to whom he ever speaks when he comes here to the hacienda," was the reply. "He used to talk to mama and me together; but now, to this woman who pretends to be my mama, he never speaks at all."

"Do you know anything at all about where he lives?"

"No; only that it is somewhere on the White Lady Mountain."

The detective arose, lighted a candle, and helped the boy to dress; and when that was accomplished he quickly adjusted his own clothing.

The windows of all houses in that part of Mexico are invariably protected by heavy iron bars, relics of revolutionary times, when every man's house had to

he also his fortress; so they were compelled to pass along the balcony inside the court, or patio, for it is a rare thing in a Mexican house that one room opens directly into another.

Nor is there ever more than one entrance from the outside, which is always a wide doorway so large that a loaded hayrick might be driven through it. This great door is closed and barred at night; but there is always a small door through it for persons to pass, although there never is a time when a portero is not on guard near it.

At night he sleeps, like others in the house; but his bed is a *petate*, or straw matting, which he places directly before the small door so that no one can pass in or out without waking him.

The problem just now was to get past that portero without needlessly alarming the household, and Nick studied over it a moment, finally bending down and whispering into Tranquilino's ear:

"You must keep very still, Lino mio, and when we approach the portero, you must stand where I leave you and wait for me. I shall make him sleep more soundly, so we may pass him in safety."

"You will not hurt him, señor? He has been kind to me."

"No. I will not hurt him at all," was the reply.

There are certain articles useful in Nick Carter's profession without which he never travels. They include his weapons that he carries in his sleeves, his picklock, his pocket electric torch, his tiny case of miniature tools which are yet giants of execution when properly applied, and a vial of chloroform.

It was this last to which he had recourse now; and when they had approached near enough to the sleeping portero he left the boy, again cautioning him to be quiet, and crept forward as silently as a shadow until he was within arm's length of the sleeping man.

Then, removing the cork, he reached forward and held the opened vial directly beneath the nostrils of the sleeping man so that the fumes that escaped from it were taken into his lungs as he breathed.

Three minutes later the detective lifted the boy in his arms and, stepping quietly and quickly over the prostrate figure of the portero, passed out of the building and closed the little door after them.

And so they presently stood together in the bright light of a full moon which shone down upon them with a brilliancy which was rather disconcerting after the utter darkness of the interior of the house.

Nick knew in what general direction from the house the stables were located, and he hurried away, again with the boy in his arms; and, by listening to the little fellow's directions, he presently found the place he sought.

In one respect this hacienda was an exception to most of them that Nick had seen; there were no dogs about. Usually around the *casa de la hacienda* there are many of them; and for the first time since his arrival there Nick now realized the significance of their absence. Dogs have a habit of remembering people, and they do not recognize them by appearances alone, but by scent; and now, in this case, if the señora were not the mother of the boy and, therefore, the widow of Don José, dogs that had known her would have discovered the fact, and have let it be known by their actions.

"Is that the reason why there are no dogs here?" the detective asked himself.

But it was a fortunate circumstance, considering what he was attempting now. There were no dogs to give the alarm; and so they presently arrived at the stables unheralded.

Nick's electric torch discovered for him the necessary accouterments, and, having selected the two best horses there, and saddled and bridled them, he placed the boy upon one—Mexican boys can ride as soon as they can walk—and they started away toward the base of the mountain, keeping in the shadow of the cypress-trees as long as possible, and finally coming out upon the moonlit plain, where they urged the horses to a gallop and stretched away toward liberty and safety for the boy.

Nick Carter had hunted over that mountain more than once as the guest of Don Angel Sela, who owns a hacienda at the opposite side of it from where he was then, and he knew many of the trails upon it almost as well as the natives.

But the mountain is a huge affair. The summit of it, where the snow lies year in and year out, shaped like a sleeping woman—from which it derives its Aztec name of Ixtaccihuatl, or the White Lady—is more than ten miles from end to end, and the base of it is three times as long.

Still the detective reasoned that Secundino, if he was in the habit of descending occasionally to the hacienda where he had once been employed, must live somewhere near the main trail from Las Aguas.

There was never a sign of pursuit as they advanced.

They had made their escape without giving any alarm, and the seven or eight miles before they finally entered upon the mountain trail were covered quickly.

They began the ascent; not rugged or steep as yet, but winding in and out, crossing little table-lands, skirting cañons, ascending an occasional steep place, and descending others, and constantly approached wilder and more rugged scenery.

It had been shortly after midnight when they mounted the horses at the stables, and at three in the morning they came out upon a table-land from which there was a magnificent view of the valley they had just left.

They had crossed this, a distance of half a mile, and were about to ride into another pass where precipitous walls frowned on either side of it, when they were startled by a harsh voice calling to them out of the darkness:

"Para! Manos altos!" (Stop. Hands up.)

Nick obeyed instantly and so did Tranquilino; and then, while they held their arms over their heads, the voice demanded:

"Who passes?"

"Tranquilino, son of Don José Corona—and a friend," replied the detective at once; and then, after the voice had cautioned him to keep his hands where they were, a man stepped forward out of the darkness and confronted them.

He held a Winchester rifle in the hollow of his arm, but the muzzle of it never wavered from its aim at Nick Carter's heart, and he demanded roughly:

"Why are you here?" To which Nick Carter replied quickly:

"We seek Secundino, who is Tranquilino's friend, and will assist me to protect him from his enemies. If you know Secundino, guide me to him and you shall be well repaid."

"Bueno, señor. It is well. I am Secundino," was the reply, and he lowered the weapon he carried.

CHAPTER XI.

SECUNDINO OF THE MOUNTAIN.

Secundino went at once to the boy's side, and, raising his hand, kissed it. Then he turned to the detective.

"Señor," he said, "I have the name of being mad among those who live down there;" and he pointed toward the valley. "But I am not so mad as they think me. My life's blood belongs, every drop of it, to the young Don Tranquilino, as it did to his father and his mother, and to his father's father. Will you follow me?"

He turned, without awaiting a reply, and, uttering a low command which brought a stocky-looking horse to his side, leaped into the saddle and rode into the pass from which he had appeared when he stopped the travelers; and an hour later he led them, after traversing devious trails, into a cuplike hollow in the mountain where there was a roughly built stone hut; and here he signed to them to dismount.

"How did it happen that we were fortunate enough to meet you where we did?" the detective asked him a little later, when the horses had been cared for, and the sleepy boy had been wrapped in warm blankets where he was already soundly slumbering.

"I was on my way down the mountain, señor, to get the boy," was the reply. "I know that it is his habit to ride every morning on his pony to the two springs, and I had determined that he was no longer safe in that house of death. You came in good time with him. I saw you yesterday, señor, and I knew by your manner that you were my Tranquilino's friend. And he has need of one now."

"I have sought you, with him," said Nick, in reply, "because he told me that you would be his friend; that he was the only person to whom you talked when you visited the hacienda."

"It is true, señor."

"I have sought you, also, because I believed that you could tell me many things about him that I should know."

"Why should you know them? Please tell me that," was the cautious reply.

And Nick related everything that had occurred in the history of the boy since that first meeting with him in the rain, in the doorway on Broadway, in New York; and Secundino listened attentively to the end, not once interrupting.

At the close of it he said:

"I do not know what became of Don José, or what fate has been his; but I do not believe that he is dead. Still he may be."

"And the woman who is there at the hacienda—is she Tranquilino's mother?"

"No."

"Who is she, then?"

"Probably the sister of his mother; but I do not know. I only know that there was a sister who was born at the same time as Donna Mercedes, the wife of Don José. She—the sister—fled from the convent in France, where the two were being educated; at least, so Don José has told me. She fled with a man, whom she married. Nothing was heard of her afterward. She was remembered as one who was dead. The woman yonder is probably Carmen, the sister."

"And the man, Don Patricio, who is he?"

"A stranger; an adventurer. Probably the man with whom she fled from the convent."

"This woman, then, resembles the mother of the boy?"

"As one silver dollar resembles another; as a counterfeit may be made like the real coin—outwardly. But inside, no good."

"How long have you known this?"

"Since the day of their arrival here."

"And you have done nothing at all to reveal the fraud?"

"What could I do, señor? Who would listen to Secundino, the madman?"

"But you are as sane as I am."

"Yes; but for more than two years—ever since the arrest of Don José for a crime he did not commit, I have played mad. I did not know of this plot, I could not even suspect it, or I would have done differently. As it is, I read it now, when it is too late for me to do anything, but when a man like you may do all that is necessary."

"Tell me what you know about the circumstances of the affair."

"I know very little. I suspect much."

"Tell me how you read it, then."

"The señora—the real señora—knowing of the escape of the don from prison, was waiting in quiet until she could hear from him and know that he was safe. Then came a message which purported to summon her to him, and when she was going away she sent for me and told me about it, directing that I should keep watch over her boy, and instructing

Pancho in the same way. I had no thought then that the message had not come from Don José; but when she did not send word to me, as she promised she would do, I began to suspect; and as time went by I became certain in my mind that she had been betrayed; but I did not suspect by whom, or for what reason. While I was still undecided how to act, Tranquilino suddenly disappeared, and the same night Pancho was shot from ambush, and Anita, sometimes called Annette, was spirited away. I knew, then, that there was a plot, although I could not guess what it was. And, señor, I cannot read or write. I have never been taught. I have never been away from the hacienda and this mountain. I know nothing of the countries that lie beyond it, or of the ways of the world. I could only wait and hope, trusting that Heaven would watch over her and him. Then those people came. At first I was overjoyed, believing that Donna Mercedes had returned; but when I went to her, she did not know me; and she asked: 'Who is this man? Send him away.' Then I knew."

"Assuredly."

"But since then I have watched over Tranquilino mío day and night. I have been near him to protect him all the time. When you came yesterday I said to myself: 'This is the man whom Heaven has sent to do what I cannot do;' and yesterday, when you talked with the boy near the springs, I heard all that you said, and saw all that you and he did. I was sure of you, then. Moreover, I saw that man Patricio when he went out to find you. I held my rifle pointed at his heart all the time, for I feared that he would try to kill you. It was fortunate for him that he did not, for he would have died first. But I saw that he was your enemy; and yesterday, later, when he and the woman rode out together, I believed I knew where they were going, and I rode on ahead of them and heard them talking to the man who was to take you and Don Patricio on the hunting-trip. It was arranged then that you should be shot while you were hunting, and that it should appear to be an accident, as if it was your own gun that killed you; and afterward the boy was to be given the juice of the ixtoweed until he became foolish, after which the woman, as his mother, was to apply for authority over the property of him and ——— But I cannot follow through all the mazes of it. That is sufficient, is it not?"

"Yes. Quite so."

"But I knew it was time to bring the boy here with me, and I was riding hard to do so when I met you seeking me. That is all, señor."

"You are a good man, Secundino."

"Thank you, señor. Now, it is for you to command, and I will obey."

The detective was silent for a time. Then he asked:

"What, in your opinion, will those two people do now, when they have discovered the flight of the boy in my charge?"

"I think they will take the trail, and follow you."

"I don't think I left trail enough to follow."

"They will search through all the passes of this mountain. They will know that you have not gone to Tlanaquitla; hence you will have come here."

"Well?"

"There are many men down there"—and he waved his hand toward the hacienda—"who have been brought here since those two came, from Guerrero and Oaxaca. They did not know the rightful owners of the hacienda, and they will obey the don and the woman. There are as many as fifty or sixty of them. They will pursue, and, if they find, they will kill; perhaps not the boy, but you."

"In that case, as you have explained it, Secundino, there seems but one course for us to follow," said the detective.

"The señor has but to order; Secundino will obey blindly."

"We must capture that man and that woman."

"Yes, señor."

"And we must take them, with the boy, to the City of Mexico before they can be rescued by the men you have described."

"If you think it for the best, señor."

"I do."

"Then it shall be done."

"I have a friend in the city who will believe me when I tell him about it. He is the great chief of police there."

"It is well, señor."

"But how to capture those people, and take them there without ourselves being caught before it can be accomplished?"

"It can be done, and once we have them as our prisoners, I know passes through the mountain where none can follow me."

"Good."

"We will not seek the railroad. We will travel across the mountain. We will go to the City of Mexico on horses. It is not much more than a hundred miles, as the crow flies, and perhaps twice as far by the trails we must follow."

"Then that shall be our plan. Now, how about making the capture?"

"I do not know that. Perhaps in the night, tomorrow, at the hacienda, we can steal upon them and bring them here. Perhaps they will be foolish enough to come themselves, into these mountain passes, and if they should do that——"

"Well?"

"Then I will lead them into a snare from which they cannot escape, and where we can easily make them prisoners. But, señor, have you thought about the risk in taking them to the great City of Mexico?"

"What risk, Secundino?"

"The woman will swear that she is Donna Mercedes. Those who see her, who have before not seen the real señora, will believe her. Possibly she even has papers to prove her claim. I do not know. But will not that thing you call the law give the boy

back into her charge again? For if it should, it will mean the end of the boy; not by death, but by a fate that is worse than death, since it will destroy forever his reason and make him an imbecile."

"I have thought about all that. My friend, the chief, will believe what I tell him. The boy will at least be placed under a legal guardianship. His father, in the eyes of the law, was a criminal although you tell me he was innocent; but, nevertheless, the boy and his estates can be now taken in charge by the government. He will be placed under competent care, and an administrator will be sent to the hacienda to take charge of it under direction of the government, for his benefit; and even if the woman should apparently make good her claim, she will only be allowed a small amount yearly to support her, and she will have no direct authority over Tranquilino. My friend, the chief will see to all that."

"Ah, señor, you make me very happy. How blessed it is to have knowledge when that knowledge may be used to benefit one whom you would serve. I thank Heaven for your wisdom, señor."

CHAPTER XII.

ROUNDING UP THE IMPOSTORS.

Throughout the entire succeeding day they remained where they were at the stone hut of Secundino, save that twice, once in the morning and again in the afternoon, Secundino went forth to a perch on the rocks he knew about, from whence he could command a view of the entire plain all the way to the buildings of the hacienda.

When he returned from the first of these trips he reported that several men were galloping toward Tlanapilla, and that others were approaching the mountain trail.

It was plain that pursuit had already begun, and that the man and the woman at the house were determined that Nick Carter and the boy should not escape them.

But the fugitives were entirely secure in the fastness of Secundino's retreat.

No one could find them there; or, if they did, one man could defend the place against a thousand who might attack it, since only one person could advance at a time along the narrow and perilous trail that led to it.

During the second day they could occasionally hear the shouts of the searchers, and once more Secundino spent almost the entire day abroad himself, watching the men who sought for them, but never once permitting himself to be seen.

At evening, when he returned to the hut, he announced:

"I have heard some of them talking together. They say that to-morrow more than a hundred men will scatter over the mountain in search of us, for now they are assured that you and the boy are hiding here somewhere, and they suspect that you are with me. They have orders to shoot you and me on sight; and to-morrow night they will camp on the mountain. But that is not all the news."

"What more?" asked Nick.

"The man, Don Patricio, will accompany them."

"And the woman?"

"She is never very far from him."

"Do you think that she will come also."

"So it was said. I do not know. At least, if she does not, she will be practically alone at the hacienda. Something may be done."

"You are right, Secundino."

The following day—the third since their stay on the mountain, they remained closely in their place of retreat; but late in the afternoon Secundino sallied forth and did not return till after darkness had fallen. Tranquilino had eaten his supper and was already sleeping.

"Come," said the Mexican; and, without a word, Nick rose and followed him along the pass.

They traveled in utter silence, and had covered rather more than a mile when the lights of several fires gleamed ahead of them in the distance; and when they crept nearer they could see the forms of men gathered around them, for in that altitude the nights were cold.

At some distance away from the fires two small tents had been pitched and in front of one of them Nick could see the señora seated upon a blanket with her head propped against a rock. Before her, at full length but with his head on his hand and his elbow on the ground was Don Patricio.

Nick and his guide disposed themselves as comfortably as possible, and waited; and at last, when the fires were dying down, the men one by one rolled themselves in blankets or serapes, and dropped into slumber.

It was not until all was quiet in the improvised camp that Secundino, placing his lips close to Nick Carter's ear, whispered:

"Yonder, behind the tent wherein the señora is sleeping, there is a fissure in the rock, only we will have to take a long détour to reach it. But once there, we can slit a gash in the tent and enter it without disturbing the two men they have left on guard. It has not occurred to any of them that the cleft through the rock grows bigger instead of smaller as it advances. Shall we kill the man and spare the woman?"

"Kill nobody," ordered the detective.

"Come, then."

It was fully an hour later before Secundino brought Nick through the fissure in the rocks he had described, and led him out finally immediately behind the two tents.

"The woman will scream, and perhaps the man will fight," said Nick to his companion, in a whisper.

"Let them. Those sleeping men cannot follow where I will lead, even if they are aroused."

"Are you strong enough to carry one of them, Secundino?"

"It will not be necessary. You capture the woman and carry her into the fissure, hastening along it until you pass the white boulder—you remember it?"

"Yes."

"When you have passed it, set her down and wait for me. I will bring the man."

"But how will you do it? He is a big man, and heavy."

"I will slip a noose over his head and shoulders, before he wakes; then I will drive him at the point of my knife, and he will be wise enough to obey me." And Nick smiled, thinking that Secundino was right about that, for the man did not have a pleasant or a reassuring face when he scowled.

They advanced to the first tent, inside of which the woman had disappeared; and Secundino slitted it with his knife, then motioned to Nick to enter, passing at the same moment to the second tent in which Don Patricio was sleeping.

For a moment after that there was utter silence, and then a scream rang out from the tent that Nick had entered, which echoed and reechoed along the mountainside, waking every man of their following, and instantly being answered by many hoarse shouts.

At the same instant the men leaped from their blankets and ran toward the tents.

But Nick Carter dashed out of one of them with the woman in his arms. She was still uttering scream after scream, for there is no doubt that she was badly frightened; but in a moment the sound of her cries was swallowed up in the depths of the fissure in the rocks as Nick dashed forward with his burden.

Immediately behind them came Don Patricio, prodded none too gently by the point of Secundino's knife; and twenty yards back along the crevice, just as they passed the white boulder to which the Mexican had referred, Secundino reached up one hand and dislodged a piece of rock no larger than his hand.

Instantly the white boulder trembled; then it fell, crashing into the fissure behind them and wedging itself there, effectually blocking the passage against pursuit.

"Now, madam," said Nick, in English, then, "you may as well stop your screaming, for unless those men of yours have wings they cannot follow us. If you are quiet and subdued, you will be treated with consideration; but if you persist in screaming and struggling, I will be obliged to bind and gag you; and that would not be pleasant."

Then he turned to Don Patricio.

"As for you," he said, "you will be wise if you keep still. Secundino doesn't like you any too well, and that knife of his is sharp, as you may already have discovered."

"Are you going to murder us?" gasped the woman, recognizing his voice, for it was quite dark where they were.

"No. I am going to take you both to the City of Mexico, to the chief of the police there, where I will attempt to prove that you, madam, are not Mercedes Corona, but Carmen Agramonte, her sister."

The woman gasped. Then she shouted:

"You cannot do it! You cannot do it!"

"I can at least make the effort. Come."

When they arrived at the stone hut, Tranquilino was awakened, and as he stood before the woman in the firelight he pointed his finger at her and exclaimed:

"Now, at last, señora, I dare to tell you to your face that you are *not* my mama. What have you done with her, you bad woman? Where is she?"

"She is where you will never find her," was the cold response.

"She is not dead, then. I knew it. I knew it."

"She is worse than dead. She is in a madhouse, where you will never see her again. I could not kill my own sister, but——"

She paused suddenly, realizing that she was betraying herself, and she could not be induced to utter another word on the subject.

Secundino guided them away from the stone hut that night, for they wished to lose no time, and he conducted them by trails that none knew but himself, so that by daylight they were beyond all fear of pursuit.

And that, literally, ends this story, because at the end of the fourth day after that one they arrived in the City of Mexico, where Nick conducted them at once to his friend, the powerful chief of police; for, after all, the chief of police of the City of Mexico is about the most powerful man in the country, next to the president himself.

And there things turned out about as he had described them in his talk with Secundino.

There was no way of disproving the assertions and claims of the woman. The man posed only as her administrator. Neither had committed any crime that could be proved against them under the circumstances. But the government exercised its authority over the son of Don José, as Nick had foreseen, and Tranquilino was placed in charge of an appointed guardian, under the direct supervision of the government.

And Secundino remained with him to act as his servant, Nick Carter promising to return to the city at least twice each year to see the boy.

And Don Patricio, while allowed the limits of the city and given an income from the estate, was ordered not to leave it until the entire truth about them could be discovered.

Then Nick Carter returned to New York.

THE END.

The next number—611—will contain "The [illegible] Treasure; or, Nick Carter's Adventures in a [illegible] Castle."

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CLEVER DISGUISES.

The success of detective work in New York is more dependent upon clever disguises to-day than ever before. The work of the special detail which has been assigned to the Black Hand work, the active campaign against policy shops and gambling in general and the unusual number of homicidal cases demand more of this character work probably than ever before in the history of the force. The incentive to make arrests in these cases is especially great, and under this pressure many of the detectives have developed a skill in make-up and in assuming a variety of disguises which the character actor might well envy. Fiction has its counterpart in the every day work of the department.

The most elaborate make-ups and the most picturesque detective work in the history of the Central Office are probably now going on in connection with the Black Hand work. The special squad, composed for the most part of Italian detectives, which is at work on these cases, often resorts to the most desperate means to procure evidence. The difficulty of meeting criminals on equal terms is obviously very great. The disguises which will deceive them must be exceedingly well assumed. In this work the detectives often play the roles of familiar street types. The detective becomes a peddler, a push-cart vender, a hand-organ man, or a tramp musician for days in the poorest sections. To be successful requires of course an attention to detail quite equal to that of a character actor on the stage and an infallible skill in make-up.

In the notorious Bowery case, either homicide or robbery, is [illegible] up very quickly by an experienced detective in disguise, regardless of the disguise he will assumed. To a good [illegible] Bowery type every resort from end to end of the [illegible] but the detective's make-up must absolutely [illegible]

[illegible] in the city where any one type of [illegible] every type of resort with so little question as to [illegible] to idle about with so little suspicion. A convincing [illegible] type may walk unchallenged into all the [illegible] and lodging houses, the theaters and cheap catchpenny [illegible] and the dives of every kind and he [illegible] at home without question [illegible] Broadway, or Bowery, or even Sixth Avenue, the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] makeup is exceptionally simple. The necessary clothes can be bought at any second-hand dealer's. A three or four days' beard is readily cultivated. A slightly reddened nose may be artificially assumed, with black finger-nails, short cropped hair, and a general appearance of carelessness in attire and toilet. Such a make-up seems simple enough, but it must be considered that if it is judged by exceedingly critical eyes it must be perfect to the last detail. The success of a number of Central Office men in this work is, of course, a very high compliment to their art in make-up if it were nothing more. A stage make-up, however skilful, would be absurd in real life. False beards or whiskers, for instance, are hardly known in actual detective work. By daylight the cleverest imitation would run a serious chance of detection and the slightest suspicion would, of course, be fatal.

In pool-room work the conventional disguise for such work has always been that of a countryman, or at least an out of town man of unsophisticated appearance. The disguise has, of course, had great success, but it has been found to be capable of improvement. An exceedingly clever piece of work was done recently from the Central Office by a detective disguised as a professional man.

The detective completely fooled the pool-room men—and they were old hands at the game—by the simple expedient of putting on a pair of glasses. There were other affectations of the professional man, but the glasses were enough. The detective also carried a box of instruments, considerably worn, which he had borrowed for the occasion. With these simple properties and much familiar allusion to the clinic and the hospitals the detective was received without question and gathered enough evidence to clinch his case.

In pickpocket cases, however, in contrast to this, a conspicuous make-up is most likely to be successful. For such work the detective overdresses. He selects clothes of very pronounced color and design and affects flashy jewelry and neckwear. Curiously enough, it has been found that the most conspicuous dress in this work attracts the least attention. In working on pickpocket cases—"dip" cases as they are known in the profession—the detective usually works in the East Side cafés in side streets, where stuss is played and the "dip" is likely to pass his leisure hours.

The detective in his somewhat flashy clothes poses as a man from out of town with plenty of leisure, and money enough to stand a drink or play a hand at cards. It is slow and delicate work ingratiating himself with the pickpocket, naturally an exceedingly suspicious person, but many "dips" are landed in this way. The same detective in the same make-up will ride about town for days on the rear platforms of cars watching for pickpockets.

The make-up of civil engineer or surveyor is an almost infallible illusion in certain classes of cases. When it is necessary to get into a certain ground or house which is being guarded the surveyor's instrument acts as the open-sesame. Such a place may be jealously guarded against every one, as, for instance, the newspaper reporter, the police, lawyers or doctors, but ninety-nine times in a hundred the surveyor will walk in with ease.

A curious problem confronts the detective in the so-called "lodging-house" cases. As the name indicates, the term classifies a variety of crimes usually of a violent nature connected with the lower class of lodging-houses. Murder, robbery, and assault are comparatively common in these resorts. To gain any definite information in such a case the detective as a rule must not only work inside the house, but must remain there absolutely free from suspicion often for days at a time. For such work the detective assumes the disguise of a tough down on his luck, preferably from out of town.

The most successful disguise for such work, however, is that of the fake cripple, or "hopper." Many of the beggars about New York streets have become artists in faking the appearance of a cripple, and the detectives are no less clever. A one-armed man apparently in much reduced circumstances may sit about the reading-rooms of the lodging-houses for

days, even weeks, without arousing the suspicion even of those familiar with detective work. An ordinary idler, no matter how cleverly made up, would be likely to arouse suspicion after a few days. But your cripple can warm himself into the confidence of men, and he will be indulged more or less by the most astute criminals.

The most successful disguise for such work is that of a "bell-hop," or bell-boy. The detective who assumes such a disguise must have a slight figure and a youthful appearance, which lends itself to such a make-up. In a recent Tenderloin hotel case in which a newspaper man was murdered a detective donned the livery of a bell-boy and ran errands about the hotel for days while accumulating evidence. After a few days he decided that the elevator man was in a better position to watch the different floors, and he thereupon was promoted to the dignity of an elevator man. The quiet, unobtrusive young man wearing the hotel livery attracted little attention. It seemed perfectly natural that he should be prowling about the various floors at all hours of the day and night. At the end of two weeks sufficient evidence had been gathered to fasten suspicion on the murderer.

CLEVER FISHERMEN.

On the Sault Ste. Marie the Indians have a novel method of catching white-fish. Two Indians go with a canoe into the rapids. One occupies the bow and one the stern. The latter uses a pole to keep the boat's head up stream.

They take with them a dip-net, four feet in diameter, attached to a pole or handle fifteen feet long. This is placed ready to the hand of the Indian in the bow. The fishing is done at the foot of the rapids, where the water boils and tumbles furiously.

With his pole the Indian holds the canoe or lets it float steadily sidewise, now up a little, perhaps, and then down, but always under perfect control. The Indian in the bow gazes constantly into the water, which is often ten feet deep where they are fishing, and the depths of which no white man was ever yet able to school his eye to penetrate.

Suddenly he plunges the net into the water, perhaps ten feet away, thrusting it to the bottom. Then he gives it a peculiar twist, draws it up, and turns out into the boat often as many as half a dozen white-fish, weighing from three to five pounds.

These Indian fishermen are unerring in casting their nets, and it is not an uncommon thing for them to capture three hundred white fish in a day. How they are able to see the fish in the bottom of the rapids is a mystery no one has yet been able to fathom.

A WICKER LIFEBOAT.

A lifeboat that has more than mere novelty to commend it to the attention of the seafaring community has recently been constructed by C. J. F. de Vos, of Rotterdam. Its claims are essentially practical and there is nothing about this Dutch invention to suggest the fantastic—a characteristic too often encountered in lifeboat patents.

In point of fact there is nothing unusual in the model favored by Mr. de Vos; it is in the adoption of a new material of construction that the value and interest of his invention lie. Its hull is made of cane or plaited wickerwork, and the inventor, who is already well known in Holland for his marine auxiliary patents, claims for this new method of lifeboat-building many advantages over other and older forms.

Its first and foremost advantage is obviously its practically unbreakable character. This has already been put to a severe test in a collision which occurred on the River Maas [illegible] between a Belgian sailing-yacht and a Dutch motor-boat. The violence of the collision was considerably mitigated by the fact that this wicked lifeboat lay between the two craft, and as it turned out acted as a sort of buffer, sustaining no other damage than the breaking of the mast and stays.

It is unsinkable, it has no rusting materials, and therefore requires no paint. It is not liable to leakage, and in addition to being much lighter than ordinary wooden boats it has more room for storing provisions and water. Finally, it costs less money than the usual type of boat.

SMELLING ICEBERGS.

The smelling of icebergs at sea, similar to the experience of Seaman August Jorgensen, the outlook on the steamship *Thingvalla*, on the night of the vessel's running into the Arctic floe, is nothing unusual to sailors accustomed to Northern latitudes, however odd the expression, "I smell a 'berg," may appear to landsmen and seagoers of the middle latitudes. Among the navigators from Scandinavian countries, especially and particularly Danish seamen, the smell of icebergs is familiar to the nostrils, the voyages in Arctic regions having enabled them to detect the approach or proximity of one of the dangerous visitors even before it can be discerned by the eye. In fact, with them the nose rather than the eye is trained for the discovery of the bergs, and acts with unerring judgment.

An iceberg has an odor, if it may be so called, to them unlike any other sort of scent. The moment it reaches the nostril a sensation is felt which would be perhaps peculiar and unaccountable to those unused to it, but which to the veteran iceberg-smeller is instantly and meaningly apparent. It passes from the atmosphere to the nasal membrane and to the sensorium with the speed of an electric message, warning the navigator of the peril ahead. One of the peculiarities is the odor of vegetation, which is supposed to come from the immense quantities of vegetable animalculæ frozen up in the floe, and in course of decay by the action of the heat on it from the warm climate through which the berg passes on its way to final dissolution.

The training for this singular sort of watching for perils of the deep is acquired only by constant voyaging among the ice-fields and floes, and some sailors, like Jorgensen, are better skilled at it than others. Instances are known of the discovering of bergs at distances of a quarter and a half mile, and even farther, by smell, before the floating monsters were perceptible to the eye.

While the Danish sailor is trained by the sense of smell in noting them, the mariner of our northern coasts uses the senses of smell and sight with equal facility, and possesses the ability of discerning the Arctic traveler with the eye as unerringly as by the smell. To eyes practised in observing them they have cumuli or fogs surrounding them different from the haze of the coast of the sea, and these two senses of sight and smell are relied on as much as the charts and the barometers by North Atlantic skippers in sailing among the bergs.

BUTTONS AS CLUES TO CRIMES.

In the Black Museum at New Scotland Yard, London, is a fragment of a button found on the window-sill of a house which had been entered by burglars. It was the only clue the police had to work on, but in the hands of a keen-eyed young constable it led to the arrest of its owner, whom the constable met casually in the street wearing the very waistcoat with its broken button of which the fragment had formed a part.

The murderer of Mr. Delarue in Belsize lane, Hampstead, some years ago was brought to the gallows through the instrumentality of a mackintosh button found near the body of his victim.

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